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The Saints

# THE BLESSED JOHN VIANNEY

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# The Blessed John Vianney

## Curé d'Ars
## Patron of Parish Priests

By Joseph Vianney

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# BLESSED JOHN VIANNEY, CURÉ D'ARS

## CHAPTER I

### HIS HOME EDUCATION

JEAN Marie Vianney, who was to be the honour of the secular clergy in the France of our day, was born in the very heart of the diocese of Lyons, that diocese which, during the nineteenth century, was destined to provide our country with more apostles, and more charitable works than any other. He belonged to the agricultural class, from which our best priests have always been recruited.

His father was Matthieu Vianney, son of Pierre Vianney and Marie Charavay, and his mother was Marie Beluze, daughter of Pierre Beluze and Marie Tabard. They owned some land at Dardilly, a large village situated quite near Lyons, in an exquisitely peaceful and retired spot, at the foot of the Monts d'Or; and it was there that the future Curé of Ars was born, on May 8th, 1786. The family already consisted of two girls and a boy; and another brother and sister were born afterwards. At his baptism he received the name of Jean Marie; to which

later on, at his confirmation, he added that of Baptiste.

He began his studies at the age when they are usually finished. But before his immediate preparation for the priesthood, he had undergone another, less direct in appearance but none the less efficacious. He had been brought up in a very Christian atmosphere, and had learnt to love charity by seeing it daily practised. Every evening, at his father's house, there was a constant procession of poor people, who came to beg a bowl of soup and a night's lodging on the straw of the barn. Sometimes there were as many as twelve or fifteen, some standing round the big fire-place, where a log was blazing, while others were seated on the threshold of the dwelling. Often it happened that the supply was too small for the number of guests, in which case the father of the family deprived himself of his own portion to make an extra one.

On one occasion, before the birth of Jean Marie, Benoit Joseph Labre was among the beggars, whom M. Vianney had invited to his table. The Saint no doubt prayed for a blessing on his host's hospitable house; and perhaps it was in answer to his prayer that He, who has promised to reward even a cup of water offered in His name, sent to the humble labourer, who shared his supper every night with the unfortunate, that truly magnificent reward, a son, who was to practise, in an heroic degree, all the hereditary virtues of his family.

Little Jean Marie early showed signs that he was to surpass his parents in charity. He brought every

beggar he encountered to his father's house, and welcomed those who came there of their own accord. He would open the door for them, relieve them of their bags, and carry their torn clothes to his mother, that she might mend them. He was specially interested in children of his own age, and deprived himself of food, that he might have more to give them; and, knowing that man does not live by bread alone, he taught them the great truths of religion, which he himself had imbibed while yet an infant.

Later on he was wont to declare that he could not even remember the day on which he began to love the Blessed Virgin; it seemed to him as if he had always done so; she was, with God, the object of his earliest affection. Indeed the names of Jesus and Mary were the first, which Marie Vianney made her children pronounce. The first gesture she taught them was the sign of the cross. She accustomed them to regard sin as the worst evil which could befall them. Adapting, though no doubt unconsciously, the beautiful words of a queen, this peasant woman used to say: "I could have no greater grief than to see one of my children offend God." One day, when repeating this to Jean Marie, she added with emotion: "My little Jean Marie, my grief would be even greater if it were thee."

He was, in fact, her favourite. Even before his birth she had prayed to God to take her child, one day, into His service. As soon as she saw a special inclination towards piety in him, she set her heart on developing it.

For this reason, her son always showed himself

exceedingly grateful to her to the end of his life. When one of his assistants congratulated him on having so early had a love for prayer: "I owe it to my mother," he replied, "she was so good." He said also to the same priest, when speaking of her: "Virtue passes easily from a mother into the hearts of her children, who readily copy what they see her do."

Whenever he wanted to teach the mothers in his parish how they should bring up their children, he proposed as a model, the education he had received from his. Brought up by this excellent Christian, Jean Marie early became very pious. While quite a little child, he one day disappeared, and was found kneeling in a corner of the stable; absorbed in prayer, he had not even heard them call him. He used to pray when going to his work, in the meadows, while keeping his sheep, and in the fields when he was digging. After the midday meal he lay down on the ground to rest like the others; but while they were sleeping, he only pretended to do so, praying to God meanwhile with all his heart. For to him prayer was duty, recreation and joy.

Again it was prayer which gave him the strength he needed for digging the rich and loamy soil, in which the peasants, living on the outskirts of Lyons, grow such beautiful fruit. The first time he was employed in the hard toil of the vineyard he went home quite exhausted. The next day he placed a small statue of the Blessed Virgin, at a short distance from the spot where he had to begin his work; and with his eyes fixed upon it for encouragement, he

advanced digging and praying, moving the statue further every time he reached it; and this he continued doing till the evening. On that day he had finished his task before his elder brother; and henceforth he always relied on prayer, to increase the strength of his arms tenfold.

In his prayers he showed both reserve and courage: sometimes he isolated himself and spent part of the day in intimate communion with God; at others, he ventured to propose that his companions should join him. "How happy I was," he said, some months before his death, "when I had only my three sheep and my ass to look after! I could then pray to God whenever I wished."

Jean Marie reached the age of reason just when the churches of France were closed. At the moment when he began to need a priest, he saw them proscribed. This was a terrible trial for the pious child, but one which determined his vocation.

It made him feel the necessity of the apostolate and the cruel position of a flock without a shepherd. He was not long in recognising with dismay, into what depths of ignorance many of his little comrades were plunged, whose mother had not, like his own, been capable of replacing the curé as a catechist; and very often for their sakes he tried to be one himself.

He would assemble them at the foot of an improvised altar of grass, where he had placed a statue, invite them to recite their prayers, and repeat those which he had learnt from his mother. Then he would preach a naïve little sermon such as this:

"Come my children, be very good, and love the good God with all your hearts."

Not one of the youthful audience ever thought of smiling, so pure and ardent was the zeal of their little preacher, and his mother rejoiced that, by his young lips, some fragments of Christian instruction were given to these poor little shepherd boys, who could no longer receive any in their village church.

At the same time that he was brought to recognise the deplorable blank, caused by the absence of the parish priest, Jean Marie had an opportunity of learning the worth of true, priestly souls. For in spite of sentences of exile and death, the sacred ministry still continued to be exercised everywhere.

In the Diocese of Lyons, it was regularly organised. M. Linsolas, the Vicar-General of Mgr. de Marboeuf, had portioned out the eight or nine parishes of his diocese, into forty or fifty mission stations. One of these mission centres was established at Ecully, a village situated between Lyons and Dardilly. The missionaries of this group were M. M. Royer and Chaillou of the Society of St Sulpice, one of whom had been the Econome, the other the Direc of the Grand Séminaire of Lyons, M. Bal formerly Canon of the Church of St Genèviève, and M. Groboz, who had been vicar of the parish of St Cross, at Lyons.

All four of them were men of indomitable energy who, while the Terror was at its height, had risked their lives a hundred times to carry consolation to those Catholics, who had remained faithful.

They settled at Ecully, lodging separately; and

disguised as workmen, assembled their parishioners as best they could in barns and woods. From Dardilly, Matthieu and Marie Vianney often went with their children to these clandestine meetings; the distance was not great, and Marie Vianney, who was born at Ecully, had a married sister there. Thus Jean Marie, on several occasions, came into close contact with these good priests, on whose heads he well knew a price was set. One of them, after having been exiled, had returned to Lyons, thus incurring the greatest risks; another had already been arrested and had escaped by some unknown means; all were looked upon as doomed to death. They themselves had all the more reason to tremble for their lives, because at certain moments, when the persecution had slackened, they had ceased to take precautions, and had thus revealed their presence to persons, who were only awaiting the return of the evil days in order to denounce them; and these evil days returned many times. But their peril only served to redouble the zeal of the heroic missionaries; and increase the veneration with which they inspired their flocks. Thus it does not astonish us that the Curé d'Ars always cherished so exalted an idea of the priestly office, when we know that his first impressions of it were taken from the ministry of such devoted men.

He kept a lasting memory of the day when, at the close of one of these offices celebrated under such dramatic circumstances, he had recourse for the first time in his life, to the sacerdotal ministry.

He had been present with his mother at the mass

of M. Groboz. The latter, struck with the astonishing piety the boy had shewn during the office, desired that he should be presented to him. Jean Marie, on being questioned, stated his name and age; he had just passed his eleventh year.

"And how long is it since you last confessed?" the missionary demanded.

I have never yet confessed, was the answer.

"Well, would you like to do so at once?"

Jean Marie was quite willing. Only God knows what passed in this first intimate conversation between the priest and him, who was, later on, to receive the confessions of so many sinners. But we may have some idea of it from words which, one day, escaped him in spite of his humility: "When I was young, I was quite ignorant of evil; I have only learnt to know it in the confessional from the mouths of sinners." M. Groboz had doubtless never before met with a child, who had so nearly retained his baptismal innocence, although he had reached an age when, in less troublous times, he would already have made his First Communion.

M. Groboz at once asked that Jean Marie might be prepared for this great act. For this reason his parents left him for some time at Ecully; but unforeseen obstacles having deferred the ceremony, Jean Marie returned to them. The next year he was sent back to Ecully, where he followed the Catechetical Instructions with fifteen other children, and was admitted to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. This took place in the house of the Comtesse de Pingon, but the precise date cannot

be given. The young communicants went there separately at daybreak.

It was in the hay-making time, and large waggons of dried grass were left standing before the windows, to protect from the eyes of the curious, those sixteen little culprits guilty of the heinous crime of making their First Communion.

With what ecstasy must he, the most pious amongst them, have approached the Holy Table. There is no doubt he astonished his companions by his recollectedness, for, during the preceding days, whenever they had noticed him absorbed in prayer, they had said admiringly to each other: "Look at little Vianney, trying to emulate his good angel."

Some years afterwards, Jean Marie witnessed another ceremony, which took place under quite different circumstances, but which also left an undying impression upon his young imagination. No restraint then marred the outburst of religious enthusiasm.

From the belfry of Dardilly the bells pealed forth merrily; the streets were festooned with evergreens; the doors were draped with white cloth adorned with bunches of flowers, and the ground was strewn with rose-leaves. All the inhabitants of the village, the men bareheaded, the women veiled, marched two by two chanting the *Pange lingua*, and following the silver monstrance, which was carried in triumph past the houses.

The Consulate had, in fact, re-opened the churches, and France was again beginning to celebrate, as in times past, the Feast of Corpus Christi.

Jean Marie contemplated with rapture the pomp of these Catholic ceremonies, to which his eyes were so unaccustomed. His heart was overflowing with joy. Yet at the same time sad thoughts would obtrude themselves. He knew that the persecutions had decimated the clergy; and on seeing this crowd so eager to receive the Divine Word, he anxiously wondered if there would be enough apostles, to distribute the Bread of the Gospel to so many starving ones; and he earnestly prayed, that there might be no lack of good curés, to supply the needs of these country places.

God heard this prayer and granted it in a way that, at that time, Jean Marie would hardly have dared to conceive. But the time had not yet come when the child was to be taken from his surroundings; he still had much to learn from the simple life of the fields and from his parents' example.

Several years elapsed between the day on which Jean Marie made his First Communion and that on which he began his studies: they were quite uneventful ones, but fertile in spiritual progress, for his virtues developed rapidly. His charity had now that refinement of delicacy, which is as sure a sign of saintliness, as the depth of certain thoughts is of genius. The Revolution had not stopped the daily procession of the poor to the house of the Vianneys; and from henceforth, the most repugnant of them were the special objects of Jean Marie's predilection. He loved to use his skill on their behalf, and his clever fingers would fashion as if in play all kinds of rustic objects. He could even

make quite life-like little statues out of clay. He removed the mud, dirt, and insects, with which these wretched people were covered, put their rags into the oven on a sort of screen he had constructed for the purpose; and then when he had seen them comfortably settled on the straw of the barn, clothed in their clean, dried garments, he would carefully purify the places they had occupied in the kitchen, so that his brothers might not feel any repugnance in sitting there.

But it was not only wayfarers whom he assisted. He used to visit all the poor of Dardilly in their own homes. He would give them all he possessed, and interested his parents and brothers in their welfare.

He persuaded Matthieu Vianney, already so generous, to make still more liberal gifts to the poor. He had no greater joy than to hear his father say: "Go and take some wood to that poor man, and load the donkey with as much as he can carry."

His piety expanded freely, fanned by the breath of religious feeling, which the restoration of public worship had re-awakened in the rural districts. He availed himself of every opportunity, such as taking a tool to be repaired or performing an errand, to run to the village church and kneel before the tabernacle.

He assisted at Mass as often as he could, and used to prolong his thanksgiving, still he never sacrificed to exercises of piety, his work, which he regarded as his chief duty. No one arrived on the field sooner than he, and there was not a better workman in

the country. Besides, he did not need to go to church to be recollected, for he prayed without ceasing, and had no need when praying to recite mere formulas. Doubtless, he loved the traditional prayers of the Church, the Pater, Ave, Gloria, and the Rosary; and often meditated on the works, miracles, and Passion of the Divine Master. Every evening in order to feed the source of his devotion, he used to read some pages of the Gospel or the Lives of the Saints, with his mother and his sister Catherine, who after himself, were the two most pious persons in the family. He usually continued this reading when he had gone up to bed, and his brother, who shared his room, was often a witness of his attentive study.

He was wonderfully good, patient, helpful, and gentle. Inclined as he was to mockery, being quick of perception and apt at repartee, he never allowed any but benevolent words to fall from his lips, and even humbly accepted reproaches which he had not merited. His gaiety was so frank, that every eye brightened at his coming; and his purity was such, that when he joined a group every tongue was paralysed, that strove to utter an immoral jest.

This true child of the soil loved to cultivate the land, which his father had inherited. First of all he began by keeping sheep with his little sister Marguerite. As he grew up he was employed in rather laborious work, but of that interesting variety, which belongs to the cultivation of the soil, in a country where land is portioned out in small allotments, and the ground will produce crops of every kind. He used

to sow and reap corn, maize, and buckwheat; mow hay and clover; dig, and dress the vines; cut wood from the beech tree; knock down nuts with a pole and carefully gather the peaches from the espaliers.

The spectacle of ever-changing nature sharpened his powers of observation, so that he imperceptibly acquired an ample provision of picturesque images for his future Catechisings, in which gems of expression would sparkle in phrases scarcely correct. Above all, his faith was confirmed in that Divine Providence, who seems to have wished the husbandman everywhere to recognise His Presence, by making the success of field labour depend on a marvellous concourse of phenomena, the government of which has almost entirely escaped the skill of our modern science.

He thus reached his seventeenth year. From his earliest infancy, his companions had several times declared that he would be a priest, and his mother had never ceased to desire it. M. Groboz, too, had no sooner made his acquaintance than he expressed the same desire. He himself had long felt within him an imperious call, which had become the guiding motive of his whole life. His Confessor on being consulted, advised him to begin his studies at once. His mother and his aunt from Ecully, Marguerite Humbert, to whom he had confided his plans, were both delighted, and advised him to take his father into his confidence. But at the first mention of it, Matthieu Vianney answered, that being obliged to give a dowry to his daughter Catherine, and to buy off his eldest son from the conscription, he was not

rich enough to send the younger one to the Seminary. In spite of this decided refusal, Jean Marie did not lose all hope. It was not indeed lightly that he had formed the design of devoting himself to God; and no one knew better than he the signs of a real vocation.

As a proof of this, it was at this very moment, when he himself, in spite of all the obstacles raised by his father, still continued firmly to believe he would be a priest that, on being consulted by a friend, who thought he had a vocation for the religious life, he dissuaded him from entering the cloister, and advised him to remain with his aged parents.

Early in 1805 he was able to realise his most cherished desire. M. Balley, a former colleague of M. Groboz in the mission at Ecully, who, since the Concordat had become Curé of Ecully, opened a school for ecclesiastical students, in which Madame Vianney persuaded her husband, their son could pursue his studies at very little expense. Matthieu Vianney therefore consented that he should be introduced to M. Balley; and the latter, who had at first hesitated to take such an old pupil, had scarcely seen him when he exclaimed: "Oh, as for this one, I accept him; re-assure yourself my friend, I will sacrifice myself for you, if necessary."

But what did his new disciple know of all that a candidate for the priesthood usually knows at nineteen? He had only a few notions of arithmetic, history, and geography, learnt either at the school M. Dumas had kept for two or three years at Dar-

dilly, or during the few months he had spent at Sister Combet's, at Ecully, when preparing for his First Communion. This was all, and indeed it seemed almost nothing. And yet, Jean Marie was nearer the goal, than if he had spent ten years at college.

It was not indeed an orator for the pulpit of Notre Dame, nor a great Doctor of the Church, that God had prepared in this remote corner of the Lyonnais. If at that time religion had need of apologists in France to defend it against the arguments of sceptics, it had still greater need of country curés to demonstrate, by the sanctity of their lives, the truth of the Gospel, in which the people had ceased to believe. The child from Dardilly had been chosen, from among all others, to be the model of those holy priests, who are indispensable to the execution of the divine plan. This was why Providence, having caused him to be born in the heart of the country, had made him a husbandman for more than twenty years; and this was why, before being confided to masters, with whom he was to learn a little Latin, he had been left to the training of two peasants, who in teaching him to love Jesus Christ and the poor, as no one else could have done, gave him the knowledge more indispensable than any other to fit him to accomplish his mission.

## CHAPTER II

### HIS TRAINING FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

THE time passed in his studies was, for young Vianney, one of continuous trial; this would astonish us did we not easily discover the meaning of it, by looking at the rest of his marvellous life. God wished to destroy even the feeblest germs of pride in a soul, which later on, He was to endow with His highest gifts, and to show more clearly the action of His grace in His servant's works, by exposing all the deficiencies in an education, which was one day to be supernaturally completed by such sublime intuitions.

Jean Marie Vianney was not wanting in intelligence. He had even good abilities, which would certainly have gained him distinction had he commenced his studies earlier. But he began them too late, and his elementary instruction was far too superficial.

All study was difficult to him in the beginning, for he learnt slowly and his memory was unretentive; it seems however that the lessons were well taught, and that his Professor was good. Whenever he stumbled at a difficulty, and he encountered one at every step, Jean Marie had recourse to a fellow-student, Matthias Loras, whose father had shed his blood for the faith. He was a very brilliant pupil,

and fully realised all that was expected of his talents and virtues. He founded the Episcopal See of Dubuque, and later on, in the United States, earned the title of the Apostle of the West.

In spite of his own good will, and the kind assistance of others, young Vianney could not get on with his Latin. To obtain help from Heaven, he had recourse to supernatural means: he prayed, and it was an admirable sight, which Ecully long remembered, to see the young man serving the Mass of his pious teacher. He delighted in almsgiving, and would give away all he had in his purse to the poor whom he met. He mortified his self-love in fulfilling all the duties of a servant at the Presbytery, such as sawing wood, and digging in the garden: he mortified his senses, and used to beg his hostess, his Aunt Marguerite Beluze, wife of François Humbert, to prepare his soup with no other seasoning than a little salt; and was quite unhappy if she forgot to obey his injunctions.

In the midst of these trials, he received the Sacrament, which bestows the spirit of intelligence. Bonaparte, then at the Head of the State, had installed his maternal uncle, Joseph Fesch, in the foremost See of France; and the new Archbishop made a visitation throughout his diocese, sparing himself no fatigue, but raising his aged hands each day to bless, confirm, and administer Holy Communion.

During the Lent of 1807, he came to visit Ecully. From all the neighbouring villages crowds flocked thither, to accompany the children, the youths, and those of riper age whom he was going to confirm.

It was so long since these good people had seen a bishop that, in spite of the rigour of an exceptionally cold winter, they lined the whole length of the road where the Cardinal's carriage was to pass, and the moment they caught sight of him, they fell on their knees in the snow. It was in the midst of an enormous affluence of the faithful that young Vianney received the rite of confirmation. He was glad that this Sacrament should be conferred on him in the village of Ecully, so endeared to him by memories of his first Confession and Communion, as well as because his mother was born there. It was on this occasion that he took the name of Baptiste, which he henceforth added to his signature Jean Marie, and in thus placing himself under the protection of the Precursor, whose food was locusts, and who declared himself "unworthy to unloose the latchet of Christ's shoe," he proclaimed his desire of meriting, through mortification and humility, the right to be the minister of those Sacraments which regenerate souls.

But God seemed to pay no heed to all his perserverance; and Jean Marie, becoming discouraged, had doubts of his vocation, and asked permission to visit his parents. His master objected. "Why do you wish to go, my child?" said he. "You know that your father will be only too glad to have you with him; and seeing your sadness, he will keep you at home, and then farewell to all our plans, farewell to the priesthood, and the salvation of souls."

Encouraged by this conversation he resolved to do violence to Heaven, and made a vow to go on foot

from Ecully to the Louvesc to the tomb of Francis Regis, the Apostle of the Cevennes, begging his bread as he went. His journey was one long martyrdom; for in every farm, where this vigorous young man asked alms, he was taken for a vagabond, and received more insults than bread. But his faith was rewarded, and on his return he was astonished to see how easily he could learn. This made him very grateful to St Francis Regis, and he placed his portrait in the Presbytery, and his statue in the Church of Ars.

But his satisfaction was short-lived, for hardly had he recovered from this trial, than he was confronted by another, which would have crushed a less resolute character.

Although none of the ecclesiastical students except those who had taken Orders, were dispensed from military service by Napoleon, Cardinal Fesch had succeeded in obtaining an exemption for all the seminary pupils of his diocese. Hence young Vianney had not been called upon to serve. But in 1809 the Emperor had such need of men for the war with Spain, that he withdrew all these concessions, and M. Balley's pupil received marching orders. Matthieu Vianney, touched by his son's despair, made a great effort and bought a substitute. But the day after he had paid the first crowns, he found them deposited on the threshold, and the young man who had consented to take the conscript's place, was sought for in vain.

In fact he was never seen again, and Jean Marie was obliged to go. As grief had made him quite ill,

they took him to the Hotel Dieu at Lyons, and afterwards to the hospital at Roanne; and in both these houses he edified all who approached him by his resignation. Scarcely had he recovered when his regiment received orders to march towards the Spanish frontier.

We must here record an episode in the life of the Curé d'Ars, which has perplexed more than one of his admirers. His first biographer, the Abbé Monnin, insufficiently informed, and doubtless unwilling to admit, that M. Vianney could be even suspected of doing anything reprehensible, acquitted him of all responsibility by explaining it as a miraculous intervention. What really happened was simply this.

At daybreak, he went to the church to ask for God's protection on his journey. So absorbed was he in prayer, that he lost count of time, and found on returning to the barracks that his comrades had set out without him. The recruiting captain wished at first to imprison him, but the young soldier's good faith was so evident that, without any further reprimand, he ordered him to shoulder his knapsack and join his regiment. He set off bravely and marched the whole day; but having only just recovered from a long illness he was quite exhausted with fatigue by nightfall, when a young man accosted him, relieved him of his knapsack, offered to be his guide, and led the way. Having followed him in all confidence, Jean Marie found himself, not at the camp but, at Noës, a village hidden in the midst of woods on the confines of the Allier and the Loire.

This district of the Cevennes was peopled by deserters, and the young man who had conducted Jean Marie was one of them. Young Vianney thus found himself in surroundings where the Imperial rule was execrated, and where nobody considered it criminal to evade the conscription ordered by Napoleon.

On the day after his arrival at Noës, he introduced himself to the Mayor of the village. The latter, on hearing that the new-comer was still at his studies, fancied that he had found the kind of man so much needed and yet so rarely met with in rural districts, at that time: namely, a schoolmaster. He asked him to open a school; and to put the police off the scent, he made him take the name of Jerome Vincent. Thus it was owing to the express advice of the Mayor of Noës that young Vianney became a deserter.

Jerome Vincent settled down in the hamlet of Robin, lodging with Madame Fayot, whom every one called "Mother Fayot," and who was worthy of sheltering such a guest under her roof. Indeed, in this humble woman, living in a remote village of the Cevennes, there was such a beautiful union of Christian virtues that the Curé d'Ars declared long afterwards that he had never known two more saintly souls than M. Balley and Madame Fayot, though he owned to having known "many holy men and women."

The schoolmaster of Robin met with much success. He knew so well how to manage children that, when they returned to their parents, most of them begged

to be allowed to go back again to their master until evening. Then a new class began, more attractive than the other, in which they were told stories from the Gospel and the Lives of the Saints. Soon it was not only the children who were won over, but the whole village became his scholars, for the Curé of Noës, charmed to have found such a valuable helper in his parish, pointed out to him, that it would be a mission worthy of his zeal, to cause the evenings so often spent in frivolous pastime, to be used for the glory of God. So after supper Jean Marie used to go sometimes to one house, sometimes to another. He was always welcomed with deference, and would keep his audience spell-bound, by his tales full of charm and edification.

When the return of summer robbed him of his pupils, he offered his services first to his host and then to his neighbours, and the fields of Noës saw him, as did formerly those of Dardilly, praying unceasingly, that he might work the better. However, at Ecully and Dardilly, every one thought him dead, except M. Balley, who had never doubted that Providence had destined his pupil to save many souls. Matthieu and Marie Vianney were inconsolable; and to the grief caused by the loss of their child, was added the annoyance of having to contend with the gendarmes, who persisted in maintaining that the young conscript had been hidden by his parents, and continually threatened them with fines or imprisonment.

At length, after long months of silence, they knew their son's fate. While he was suffering from

a severe attack of pleurisy, from having worked too hard in the hay fields, Madame Fayot also became ill. Being obliged to take the waters of Charbonnieres, she brought a letter from Jean Marie and gave it to his parents as she passed through Dardilly. Madame Vianney wept for joy, but her husband, though glad to hear that his son was living, was vexed to know he was a deserter, and ordered him to give himself up without delay to the military authorities. Then ensued a rivalry in goodwill, which ended by simplifying this unfortunate complication. François, the youngest son of Matthieu Vianney, offered to enlist before his time, on condition that his brother should make over to him three thousand francs of his future inheritance; and the recruiting Captain, the same who, after wishing to imprison Jean Marie, had sent him off alone en route for Spain, now agreed that the younger should replace the elder brother, and struck off the name of the latter from the lists.

When it was known at Noës that they were going to lose the "Saint," as every one called him, there was great sorrow; but mingled with it was the joy, which these Christian people felt in knowing that he was to return to his studies, and to the service of God. From every house humble presents poured in upon him, for these good people wished to provide him with everything, they even gave him the first cassock he was to wear. One poor woman, who possessed nothing but a pig and a goat, obliged him to accept the price of the pig, being desirous of contributing her part to the modest household of

the future Curé d'Ars. He never forgot the two winters he spent in the little village of the Cevennes; and later on, when he had thoughts of quitting the ministry, for which he considered himself too unworthy, it is believed that it was to Noës he had decided to retire.

Jean Marie Vianney had just returned to his studies at Ecully, when he lost his mother. It was she who had inspired him with his desire for the priesthood, who had received his first confidences, who had always sustained and encouraged him in the difficulties his plans had encountered, and now at the moment, when new obstacles were to arise against his vocation, he was deprived of the tender affection, in which he would have found his greatest support.

In November 1812 M. Balley sent him to study philosophy at Verrières, the only *Petit Séminaire* in the diocese of Lyons, which had re-opened its doors after all the others had been closed by order of Napoleon. There, far greater trials were awaiting him than he had undergone at Ecully. Having entered, at twenty-six years of age, among two hundred pupils younger than himself, he was not only ranked among the lowest, but considered incapable of following the course of philosophy in Latin, as it was then given in the *Petits Séminaires*; and with six of his companions he received this instruction in French.

One may be a model of humility, and yet not willingly become the butt of a whole school. The Curé d'Ars owned later on, that while at Verrières he had had to suffer "somewhat." Those

who knew how reserved he was in speaking of himself have no hesitation in translating somewhat by "cruelly." He was too modest to imagine that three-fourths of his fellow-students had no other superiority over him except that of a good memory, still less did he suspect that philosophy could have been taught in a more interesting manner.

He believed himself to be really very incapable and was much distressed about it. Even his piety was not at first specially remarked; and for some time, neither his fellow-students nor his masters, gave him any encouragement.

But his ardent zeal for souls inspired him with strength, and at Verrières, as at Ecully, he ended by making progress.

Still he was too badly prepared in philosophy to succeed. This he recognised, when, in order to enter the Grand Séminaire, he had to undergo an examination on the subjects which he had been taught while at Verrières. Fully conscious of his incompetence, questioned too in Latin and intimidated by the presence of Cardinal Fesch, he was quite bewildered, could not answer, and found himself publicly declared incapable of entering the diocese of Lyons. It was a rude blow, but he bore it bravely. His humility was increased, while his confidence remained unshaken. He had just heard himself excluded from the priesthood, when one of the students, who had passed brilliantly in the same examination, the future Cardinal Donnet, was induced to speak to him; he was so struck by his attitude, that he could never forget their conversation.

Before pronouncing his final rejection, M. Balley persuaded them to confide young Vianney to him; and some months later at Ecully, before M. Bochard, the Vicar-General, and M. Gardette, the Superior of the Grand Séminaire, he underwent a fresh examination, in which he satisfied his judges. In fact these few months had sufficed to give him a fairly good philosophical education. For at Ecully he had met with a master who, with perhaps less science than the professors of Verrières, was more versed in the great book of life, and knew how to give a practical turn to his lessons and draw philosophic conclusions from all he read or saw. Under his intelligent discipline, M. Vianney's intellect rapidly expanded; and in the course of the year 1814 he was at length able to enter the Grand Séminaire.

There, as at Ecully, he was remarked for his piety and even temper, his goodness and submission to the rule, rather than by his learning, though at first he did not show any more aptitude for theology than he had shown for philosophy. But M. Gardette, who had had some experience of men, gave him as tutor M. Duplay, his most distinguished pupil, causing them to share a room together as he foresaw that the two young men would soon become great friends.

They often held long discussions, to which the one brought the vivacity of his intelligence, the other the ardour of his piety, and which left them both all the more worthy of the missions awaiting them, the latter at Ars, the former at the Grand Séminaire of Lyons, where he became superior.

There was, at this time, such great need of priests that, in 1814, after only a few months of theological study, it was proposed to make M. Vianney sub-deacon. But it was doubtful if Holy Orders could be conferred on such an ill-instructed seminarist as he. Mgr. Courbon desired to question him himself, and afterwards declared he was quite satisfied. "You know," he said to him, "as much as many other Curés." When the Directors of the Seminary came to learn his decision he asked them: "Is young Vianney pious? Does he know how to recite his rosary? Has he any devotion to the Blessed Virgin?"

For piety, they answered: "He is the model of the whole seminary."

"Very well then," he added, "I will receive him, the grace of God will do the rest."

M. Vianney was made sub-deacon on July 2nd, by Mgr. Claude Simon, Bishop of Grenoble, who represented Cardinal Fesch. When the procession of the newly ordained quitted the primatial church of St John to proceed, according to custom, to the Square Croix Paquet, where the Grand Séminaire was situated, the burning ardour of M. Vianney's gaze, and the transport of joy with which he chanted the Benedictus, so impressed his companions, that they at once applied to him the words of Holy Scripture. "This is he," they thought, "who will be the prophet of the Most High, the one among us all who will do the greatest things in the service of God."

M. Vianney finished his third year of theology in 1815, in the midst of the convulsions which then agitated France, and caused disturbances even in the

Grands Séminaires, but especially in that one in a diocese, which was still under the jurisdiction of Napoleon's uncle.

He heard his companions curse the returned exile from Elba, he saw them refuse to chant the prayer for the Emperor, and even, on one occasion, avoid the benediction of their Archbishop. For himself, he suffered chiefly from not being able peacefully to pursue his studies, which he wanted so much to complete. He obtained permission to finish them at Ecully, where, under M. Balley's direction, he learnt much in a short time.

He was ordained deacon on June 23rd 1815, a glorious date in the annals of the Diocese of Lyons, for on that day three among those who took deacon's orders were destined to be canonised: the Blessed Vianney; the Venerable Champagnat, the Founder of the Petits Frères de Marie, whose cause has been introduced at the court of Rome, and Père Colin, Founder of the Marists, whose process is now being examined at the same court.

M. Vianney's two companions did not enter the priesthood till the following year. But he, being older, was soon invited to go to Grenoble, where he was ordained by Mgr. Simon on August 13th, the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, in the ancient chapel of the Minims, which was then the chapel of the Grand Séminaire. There was no other candidate: but the bishop said that one could not take too much trouble in ordaining a good priest.

M. Vianney was twenty-nine years of age. More than twelve years had elapsed since, at the first call

of God, he had answered, "Here am I, Lord," and during these twelve years God, after having accepted his generous offering, had seemed as if He no longer wanted him. His father had for a long time refused to pay the money necessary for his education; the conscription had snatched him from his studies almost before he had fairly begun them; twice he had been overtaken by illness; at Ecully and at Verrières his instruction had been attended with such difficulties and such apparent, though not real, want of success, that the doors of the Grand Séminaire had been nearly closed against him, and its Directors had hesitated to admit him to Holy Orders. But at length in spite of all he was a priest; and thanks to the mortifications which so many trials had imposed upon his self-love, thanks to the continual acts of faith and charity by which he had sought for strength, he was now ready to fulfil his mission, and destined to become not only a good priest, according to the wish expressed by M. Simon for him on the eve of his ordination, but the model, which the Church would one day propose for the imitation of the clergy of our own times. He was too accustomed to humiliate himself to believe he could ever arrive at perfection; called upon to struggle against the spiritual evidence of a whole population plunged in spiritual lethargy, he had learnt during his laborious studies, that human will is capable of every effort, if aided by divine grace. Later on he summed up the rôle of a curé in these two maxims. "A curé must never persuade himself that he can no longer do any good in his parish, how-

ever sterile his efforts may hitherto have been, and he ought never to think, however much he may have done, that he has done enough. Who does not see that his education had prepared him to form this conception of the duties of a priest, and to fulfil it?

One last trial was laid upon him which proved to be a means of instruction: he, who had desired to be a priest especially to save souls, was forbidden to administer to them that sacrament of penance, which is the chief instrument of their salvation.

This humiliation, however, brought him great happiness and grace, for M. Courbon, convinced that no one knew how to complete his sacerdotal education like the master who had hitherto taught him everything, nominated him vicaire at Ecully.

There the Abbé Vianney re-commenced his theological studies. Every day M. Balley gave him a lesson in dogma and morals; and submitted to him cases of conscience, demanding prompt and well-reasoned answers, tending towards the most liberal solutions.

When he judged that this mental training had attained its purpose, he asked that his vicaire might be empowered to confess him; and it was over the head of this saintly old man that the hand, which was afterwards to absolve so many hardened sinners, was raised for the first time.

Soon the Abbé Vianney obtained permission to confess the whole parish; those who had recourse to him were so satisfied with the wisdom of his

direction that, later on, many of them undertook the journey from Ecully to Ars, rather than be deprived of his counsels. However, his virtue grew with his knowledge. He was lodged, according to the custom of the Diocese of Lyons, in the house of his curé, and became the constant companion of his daily life.

He shared his exercises of piety and his mortifications, recited his breviary with him, and, many times a day, made acts of love of God; following his example, he would remain for hours motionless before the altar; at his table he ate potatoes prepared several days before, and beef which had turned quite black, from having been kept too long.

The whole of his stipend went into the hands of the poor, just as his earnings had done when he was a young man, and any clothes that were given him went the same way; he possessed literally nothing except what he wore.

He continued as at Dardilly, to give his heart with his money. The sick were the objects of his preference: he made them short but frequent visits, having a marvellous power of consoling them when their sufferings were prolonged, and of preparing them for death when the hour of their departure arrived.

It was in his arms that his venerable curé passed gently away on the 16th of December 1817, at the age of sixty-nine. Exhausted by labours and fasting. M. Balley had been confined to his room, with an ulcer in his leg for more than a year. Some days before his death he confessed to his vicaire, and received the Viaticum and Extreme Unction; then,

in the presence of the clergy, of the neighbours, and a few parishioners, he asked pardon for any wrong he might have done them. When he found himself alone with his dear child, as he called him, he gave him his instruments of penance, wishing, in his humility, that they should not be discovered on his body. He was followed to the Cemetery by Abbé Loras, then the Superior of the little Seminary of Meximieux, and by Abbé Vianney; and of all the good works in which his exemplary life had abounded, the greatest was that of having trained these two pupils.[1]

Some weeks later a curé, who had only just taken possession of his charge, died at Ars in the Doubes. Mgr. Courbon at once sent for M. Vianney. "My friend," he said to him, "you are named Curé of Ars. It is a small parish, where there is not much love of God. You will enkindle it."

In sending its new curé to the parish of Ars, the Vicar-General did not foresee that the Department of Ain was to be separated from the Diocese of Lyons, and that the most holy of his priests would soon exercise his ministry in the Diocese of Belley,

[1] Abbé Monnin affirms, and I do not know on what grounds, that the inhabitants of Ecully, whose real pastor M. Vianney had been for a year, asked to have him as curé. I have heard it said that they manifested, on the contrary, the desire that such a simple priest should not be placed at the head of their parish. Whether they made any overtures in either sense, it must have been orally, for no traces exist of them in the archives in the Archbishop's house at Lyons. I cannot therefore determine what the real feelings of the inhabitants of Ecully were in regard to their vicaire. In any case, soon after the death of M. Balley M. Tripier, and not M. Vianney, was appointed his successor.

although Dardilly, his birthplace, was still to remain in its original see.

Early in February 1818, the Abbé Vianney set out, in order to kindle a little love for God in his small parish, where forty-two years later he was to die, after having converted it into a burning centre, from which the love of God spread throughout the Dombes, Burgundy, the Lyonnais, and the whole Kingdom of France.

## CHAPTER III

### THE REFORM OF THE PARISH OF ARS

ARS, situated on the verge of the great uplands in the Principality of the Dombes, has no distinctive character of its own.

Just before reaching it on the route from Lyons, the chain of wooded hills, whose graceful outline is mirrored in the cool waters of the Saône, abruptly ends; and, a little beyond it, in the direction of Bourg, begins that region, the melancholy beauty of which a great artist has caught and immortalised in his chefs-d'œuvre, representing knotted elms and great, lone, stagnant pools, haunted by flights of wild fowl. A tame horizon, a yellowish soil, sparse hedges, a double row of elders each side of a little stream, the ancient castle of the d'Ars family half hidden in a clump of trees, with a few brick and mortar houses clustering round an insignificant church: this is what the Abbé Vianney dimly saw, when he entered his new parish, at nightfall one evening in the February of 1818. What a contrast to Ecully and Dardilly!

Still less, in its moral aspect, did Ars remind its new curé of the two villages, in which his life till now had been spent.

It was not perhaps a thoroughly bad parish, but

its people were indifferent and apathetic, eager only for pleasure. There were no regular offices besides the daily Mass and Sunday vespers, and, on week days, not more than two or three women were present. As to the men, on the least pretext they missed the Mass on Sunday, or if they did come, they showed every sign of weariness, and from the altar during the Holy Sacrifice, from the pulpit during his sermon, M. Vianney saw them sleeping, gaping, turning over the leaves of their books as if to see, as he told them ironically, if the printer had made any errors.

Hardly had the celebrant left the altar, than there was a general rush towards the door, as if the whole parish were suddenly seized by an attack of sickness. Once in the open air, their chests would dilate, their hearts expand, their tongues begin wagging.

"Assuredly," they cried, "the curé is doing his best to sicken every one of church, by his outrageously long sermons."

It was useless to ask these poor people to be present at the evening office. The church, therefore, remained well-nigh empty during vespers, whilst the four village taverns were crammed to overflowing. Indeed, the good curé was only too glad when the chanting of the psalms was not drowned by the noise of drunkards stumbling over the stones, or the oaths of the players at bowls whenever they missed their aim.

The most pious women only went to Communion on the great festivals of the Year; many of the men were ashamed to perform their Easter duties, and

one of them even asked M. Vianney, if he could not make his in the Sacristy, so that no one might see him.

Their Patronal Feast of St Sixtus was a religious one in name only: the men celebrated it by a week's drunkenness, the young people by immoral dances and unbridled licence.

No one at Ars would have stolen a sou from his neighbour's pocket, but very few had any scruples in painting an old horse, to conceal its defects, or in making up bundles of hemp in such a manner as to hide all the bad stalks. Fathers would only laugh when their children came with their aprons filled with radishes, pulled up they knew not where. They did not plough on Sundays, but there were other and less important things that they reserved for that day, such as mending their tools, and it seemed as if the Dominical observance had no reference to the harvest season; for then, throughout the whole of Sunday morning, the roads were lined with waggons carrying home the hay, which, as the curé in his forcible language remarked, "were still more surely carrying souls to hell."

Ars was not changed in one day; it needed many years for it to shake off its torpor; but when the change was once accomplished, it was so wonderful, that priests, who stayed there for a few days, went away amazed.

In all the country-side no blasphemy was heard, not a single labourer was to be seen at work on Sunday, stacks were left standing, even when the weather was threatening; and the peasants, when

strangers reproached them for their imprudence, answered, echoing their curé's words: "The hay would know how to take care of itself."

Many of the women communicated every week. All the men fulfilled their Easter duties.

No one was missing at the Sunday Mass. A great number were present at vespers, which were followed by Compline and the Rosary; and in the evening, when the bells for the third time called the villagers to church, the houses were for the third time emptied.

Every evening prayers were publicly recited before a large congregation. "We have once more regained our self-respect," said an inhabitant of Ars one day, for there was naturally progress in morality as well as in religion. There were no more drunkards lying in the ditches; and the four taverns had been closed, one after the other, for want of customers.

There was no longer any immorality among the young people. There were no more dissensions between relations nor quarrels between neighbours. The parish was the large family, where all helped each other. The children had lost the habit of stealing their neighbour's fruit; and at the market of Trévoux every one could now believe all the peasants said, when they offered their cattle or their hemp for sale.

"My brethren, Ars is no longer Ars," said the good curé at the end of the exercises; and, rendering a still more flattering testimony to his parish, he congratulated it on having become not only more Christian than in the past, but the most Christian

parish he knew of. "I have been present at many missions," he said, "and nowhere have I found such good sentiments as here."

What M. Vianney did to change his parish is worth relating, as Bossuet says, "not because it is remarkable, but because it is not." And because the Curé d'Ars did nothing that another priest may not try to imitate."

He knew that the mission of a curé is not that of a monk, that God wishes to make use of human means in order to attract men to Himself, and that the faith, which is not active, is not sincere. He worked then, worked unceasingly, making use of all the means, with which nature and education had provided him.

Because his parishioners would not go to him, M. Vianney went to them. He was not contented with calling on every one on his arrival, but he made a habit of visiting regularly. Scarcely a day passed without his going to see some one or other. He would chose the hour of the midday meal, when all the family was assembled. He would greet the father familiarly by his Christian name, and then, without accepting even a glass of water, he used simply to lean against some piece of furniture and enter into conversation. His thorough knowledge of agriculture readily furnished him with a subject, and gave him an undisputed authority among his parishioners. They understood at once that their curé was one of themselves; and many of them, before asking his advice as to the culture of their souls, would go to him for information about that of their fields.

But M. Vianney would not dwell at too much length on these merely terrestrial affairs; very soon, and without any effort, he would begin to speak of heavenly things, saying just what was most suitable to his listeners, always showing great affability, even when they did not seem disposed to listen, and never making any reproaches even when they were most deserved. Besides, he was discreet enough not to outstay his welcome, and always left before he could be considered importunate. They quickly grew accustomed to these visits and very soon regarded them as an honour, then they desired them as a consolation, and many were the souls brought home to God by means of these simple talks.

Since his parishioners knew so little of their duties M. Vianney, in order to give them the instruction they required, set himself a task which cost him the greatest effort and severest mortification.

"My children," he once said to them in one of his catechizings, "the word of God is no vain thing. The first words of our Lord to his Apostles were these: 'Go and teach,' in order to show us that instruction is above all price.

"For how is it my children, that we have any knowledge of our holy religion? It is through the instruction we have had. What has given us a horror of sin, and makes us perceive the beauty of virtue, which inspires us with a desire for heaven? Instruction again, that instruction which teaches parents their duties to their children, and children their duties to their parents."

Convinced as he was of the importance of this instruction, he devoted all the time, which was not taken up in prayer or parochial visitation, to the preparation of his Sunday discourses. Having chosen his subject, he would take down some of his favourite volumes from the library he had inherited from M. Balley, such as the *Familiar Instructions of Bonnardel*, Curé of Semur-en-Brionnais; the *Homilies of Messire Claude Joly*, Bishop and Count of Agen; the *Sermons* of Père Lejeune; *Christian Perfection* by Rodriguez, or the *Lives of the Saints* by Ribadeneira. When his reading was finished then the tortures of composition began, whether he contented himself with simply adapting a sermon or putting the borrowed doctrine into a new frame, the labour was the same: for he did not want to say anything that could not be thoroughly understood; he desired to adapt to these uneducated rustics that which had been written for cultivated minds; and also that his preaching should profit by all that he had learnt from his own experience of life.

What this popular eloquence was, from whence he drew his gift of persuasion, we shall try to explain later on: here we simply wish to point out what time and trouble he spent in his preparation.

Seated before his modest table, the poor orator wrote, erased, corrected and saw the hours pass without any perceptible result; sometimes he spent seven hours pen in hand, sometimes the whole night. He fought against sleep until his heavy eyes would close of themselves, then he would go away and snatch a few moments' slumber before his crucifix,

imitating, as he said, the little dog who crouches down at his master's feet.

His sermon once composed, a last and still more painful effort was necessary, for he was obliged to commit to a treacherous memory the lines so laboriously written. M. Vianney devoted much time to this, and it often happened that he recited his lesson aloud, in order to retain it better.

If in the end he was able to preach not only every Sunday, but every day, if he succeeded in giving his daily instruction without any preparation whatever, and with astonishing facility, it was no doubt because grace supplied what was wanting to nature; still one can understand that such assiduous toil had already transformed nature.

All those young priests who feel they have not the gift of public speaking, and who dread having to preach, should make a pilgrimage to Ars. They would be shown M. Vianney's books, they would see those worn leaves, they might count the markers left in the pages, and the passages underscored. Before these proofs of ardent labour they might calculate the time which a man, to whom study was a real martyrdom, must have spent in reading. Then they would be inspired with real zeal for the salvation of souls, by recognising the trouble which the curé of a village of only two hundred souls, took for his modest audience: above all they would own that no one had any right to be discouraged, seeing that one of the greatest of extempore preachers was obliged to devote several days each week, to composing a sermon of three-quarters of an hour's duration.

Since his parishioners did not willingly take the road to the church, M. Vianney obliged them to seek him there. For there it was they had to go whenever they wanted him. He really made it his home, and they saw him there praying with such fervour, that the sight of the radiant smile in his eyes, which the feeling of God's presence gave him, inspired them also with a desire to pray.

To make the dwelling more worthy of its Host, and more attractive to visitors, M. Vianney undertook to restore and adorn it. The altar was falling into decay; he had a new one constructed at his own cost. The wainscotting was worn; he repaired and repainted it with his own hands.

The ornaments were tawdry, he got the Vicomte d'Ars to give him chasubles, copes, a magnificent canopy, and a silver-gilt monstrance. The building was badly lit and ventilated; he enlarged it by adding several chapels.

Two of these, one may say without exaggeration, afterwards became two of the most noted sanctuaries in our land. One was that Chapel of St John the Baptist, in which was the confessional of the Curé d'Ars, where every day, for thirty years, tears streamed from eyes to which tears had long since been unknown, where thousands of persons living bad lives came and renounced their evil habits, where noble resolves were formed in many hearts until then untouched by any generous impulse, where such wonderful conversions took place, that he who was instrumental in them exclaimed: "One will never know

until the Day of Judgment all the good which has been accomplished here."

The other chapel was dedicated to St Philomene, whose body had been discovered on the 25th of May 1802, in the Catacombs of St Priscilla. It is from this modest chapel that the devotion to the young Martyr has spread over the whole Catholic world. It is there, at the feet of the dear little Saint, as he called her, that the Curé of Ars sent those who came to ask him for healing of body or soul, and there it is that many of these unfortunate ones left their load of evil: it is there also that others heard the strengthening words, which enabled them to again take up bravely their burden of sorrowful life. But the time has not yet come to speak of the great things which took place in these little chapels; and before the church at Ars could receive the visit of pilgrims from all parts of France, it was necessary that its curé should first know how to lead his own parishioners there.

Not believing that he could accomplish everything by himself, he tried to discover persons whose good-will only needed to be awakened; he made them shake off their torpor, and then grouping them, in order to multiply their strength a hundredfold, he established the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament for the men, and the Confraternity of the Rosary for the women.

At the head of the Confraternity of the Rosary were some of the "âmes d'élite"; Mlle. Pignault, Claudine Renard, Mlle. Lacon, modest women before whom the historian of the Curé of Ars inclines

respectfully, because they were the indefatigable assistants of his heroic charity; and their obscure names should be piously remembered, so that a little of the glory which surrounds the name of M. Vianney, should shed its lustre upon theirs. Mlle. d'Ars, a great lady, but a still greater Christian, of an ancient family whose numerous branches still cover all the Lyonese region, and whose members esteem themselves to-day less honoured by their distinguished alliances, than by the fact that a pious daughter of their house was able to help the Curé of Ars.

When he sent him to his parish, M. Courbon had said to M. Vianney: "You will have a good deal of trouble there, but you will be helped by a brave lady." She was indeed brave in the noblest sense of the word: during the Revolution her mother and she had found it quite natural to remain on in their Château at Ars; the Terror itself had not dislodged them. In 1818 she was sixty-four years old, very lively, clever, and witty, a good conversationalist, and an agreeable writer; she would have had great success in the world, if she had followed her brother to Paris; but she had no other ambition than to make a good preparation for death. She never left Ars. Her charities, which her modest way of living rendered princely, extended as far as Villefranche. She had the intelligent devotion of past ages, and recited her breviary every day with her old man servant Saint-Phal. She was the first person at Ars to foresee that M. Vianney's virtues would attain an heroic degree, and of all the souls,

which he induced to follow in the ways of perfection, it was without doubt Mlle. d'Ars who most nearly approached him in sanctity.

From the men also M. Vianney met with support and consolation. There was one who, during the whole of his life, was the consolation of his curé, and whose memory was so dear that he never ceased holding him up to the admiration of his parish.

This was an old peasant who every day went into the church before going to his labour in the fields, and again when he returned. There he used to remain for a long while quite motionless and mute, with his eyes fixed on the Tabernacle.

"Père Chaffangeon, what do you say to Our Lord during your visits?" M. Vianney asked him one day, surprised at never seeing his lips move.

"I say nothing to Him and He says nothing to me, but I look at Him, and He looks at me."

How many times did the Curé of Ars quote in his catechisms this naïve and sublime saying, by which the old peasant of the Dombes had tried to explain the intimacy of those secret communings, in which Jesus Christ deigned to reward the love of his servant.

The village church often received another visitor, at least when he was residing in the district: this was the Vicomte d'Ars, the brother of Mlle. d'Ars. He spent the greater part of the year in Paris; but each of his journeys to Ars made a lasting impression, because on his departure he always left the church enriched by some magnificent donation, the poor families abundantly provided with warm

garments for the winter, and the whole parish edified by his unostentatious piety.

M. Vianney found a still more valuable helper in M. Mandy, the mayor of Ars. He was a simple peasant, not learned, but with rare good sense, an excellent administrator, who knew how to carry out many important works with the resources of his modest budget, and a man of great moral authority, who laboured, with all his might, to purge his commune of the curse of drunkenness. He early recognised the sanctity of his new fellow-citizen, and has left us a touching testimony to the veneration with which he inspired him. In fact he never put down any expenses which were incurred for the church, without giving his curé the title of Saint; and thus a few months after his arrival in his parish, M. Vianney had already figured several times in the official registers as "le saint Curé d'Ars."

However zealous might be the staff of helpers with whom he was surrounded, however active he was himself, M. Vianney expected everything from God.

He had read in the Gospel that when the disciples had not been able to cure one possessed of the devil, Jesus had said to them: "This kind cometh not forth but by prayer and fasting." He reminded one of his colleagues of this, when the latter was saddened by his want of success in his parish, and when he still claimed to have done everything he could. "You have done everything? Are you quite sure? Have you fasted? Have you given alms? Have you

prayed?" M. Vianney, in speaking thus, divulged the secret of the marvellous power of his own apostolate.

From the moment of his arrival at Ars, his penances and his alms were prodigious. But he was so humble, he practised so faithfully the precept, not to let his left hand know what his right hand did, that no one here below will ever know all that this same right hand has given; and for a long time his most faithful parishioners lived with no suspicion that he rivalled in austerity the hermits of the desert.

Mlle. d'Ars acted as his steward; she supplied him with wine, meat, vegetables, wood and all necessaries. In her account books, kept with exemplary exactitude, she noted all that she sent to the Presbytery, and also the price, as there were certain things for which M. Vianney paid, others which she gave him, for at first he did not have more than five hundred francs as stipend, Ars being simply dependent on the Parish of Misérieux, and the inhabitants there were bound to support their curé. Now, to judge by the books of Mlle. Ars, one might suppose that M. Vianney was provided with all that was necessary for a modest and even comfortable existence.

However, one day, in this house where nothing was thought to be wanting, his youngest sister, Marguerite, arrived unexpectedly, accompanied by Madame Bibost, of Ecully, the excellent woman who had looked after his linen and clothes while he was studying. It was the very year of his installation. At the sight of these uninvited guests M. Vianney appeared somewhat embarrassed. "My children," he

said, "you will have a very bad dinner." The visitors entered the kitchen, and found, in a saucepan, some cold potatoes which were getting mouldy. M. Vianney took one, peeled and ate it. "They are still good," he said, but his sister had not the courage to touch them. She made some *mâtefaims* (a kind of pancake) with a little flour she discovered in a corner. There was nothing in the kitchen, and there was no wine in the cellar. M. Vianney had laid in a store of provisions like any one else, but they only entered his house to be immediately carried to the poor.

For himself, he only kept what was just enough to prevent him from starving. He even gave that, if he had nothing else, for he took literally the Evangelical Counsels: "Take no thought for what ye shall eat, your Father, which is in heaven, will provide." One evening, shortly after his installation, M. Mandy having knocked at his door, he appeared, as pale as a ghost. "You are ill, Monsieur le Curé." "Ah, my friend, you have saved my life, I have nothing to eat." M. Mandy hastened to fetch some bread. It was three days (I am telling the simple truth) since a poor man, who was starving, had carried off the remaining provisions from the Presbytery.

M. Vianney simply lived on nothing. Catherine Lassagne, one of the witnesses of his life, has heard him often say when he was anxious about having to feed the young girls in his Providence: "How happy I was in those early days. I had no one else to provide for, I was alone. When I wanted to dine, I did

not lose much time over it. Three *mâtefaims* were enough. While I was cooking the second, I was eating the first; while I was eating the second, I was cooking the third. I finished my repast by arranging the pan and the fire, and I used to drink a little water with it."

One must not imagine by this that the Curé of Ars had such an appetising dinner as this every day. He did not take the trouble to prepare the *mâtefaims*, except when he found himself forced by weakness to take something more substantial. His meal—he only took one a day—was usually composed of potatoes cooked in water, which he ate cold six days out of seven, because he boiled all his provision for the week at one time. The last day there was often only mould in the saucepan.

For dessert, he liked to take a crust of dry bread which had lain in the wallet of some beggar, and for which he had paid dearer than he would have done for a fresh loaf from the baker. He had borrowed this practice, which suited equally well his spirit of mortification and his charity, from St Frances of Rome; and like her, when he ate this bread of the poor, he was as happy as if he had been invited to the table of Jesus Christ.

Too charitable to impose the rule which he had adopted on others, and at the same time too averse to ostentation to wish that his austerities should become known, he gave up these habits when he received his brother priests, and especially his relations. He then had a good suitable meal prepared for them, carved the meat himself, poured out the wine, and

encouraged them to eat and drink, eating of everything himself. And a striking thing happened: at the table of the Curé of Ars, it was he who ate as a duty, while his guests forgot to do so, because their host's conversation used to transport them to Paradise. "When we were at Ars," said one of his nieces, "it was like the day of our First Communion, no one was hungry."

He stripped himself of his linen and clothing besides giving away his provisions. All his wardrobe rapidly disappeared, piece by piece. Claudine Renard tried to renew it, but it was waste of time. In vain she took the precaution of not giving him back his linen; that she had to wash, except as he needed it; M. Vianney, seeing he had nothing more in his cupboard, began giving away what he was wearing. One day he was stopped by a poor man who had no shoes and whose feet were bleeding; he gave him his shoes and stockings and returned barefooted to the Presbytery. Another day having searched in vain in his pockets, which his charity had already emptied, he said to some one who had begged an alms, "Take this, my friend," and gave him his pocket-handkerchief, the only thing he had left. One evening as he was returning from the mission at Trévoux, in which he was taking part, he was wearing a good pair of velvet trousers, which his fellow-priests, seeing him so badly dressed, had forced him to accept. At the spot called Les Bruyères, a man in rags approached him, shivering with cold. "Wait a moment, my friend," said he, and he disappeared behind a hedge An instant later, the entire trousers, for one cannot

divide them as one can a mantle, had changed owners. When his friends at Trévoux made enquiries about their gift, the new St Martin answered: "I have lent them to a poor man whom I met at Les Bruyères."

"I have never forgotten my cloak anywhere," he said one day. In fact he never possessed such a garment, and he never had more than one cassock at a time, having taken literally the counsel that Jesus gave to his disciples, when he sent them into Judea: "You shall only have one coat." This cassock, which was his winter and summer garb, always lasted several years.

His clerical brethren often made remarks on his appearance, fearing lest it might compromise the dignity of the sacerdotal office. They forgot that when St Vincent de Paul used to mount the staircase of the Louvre, carrying a shabby felt hat under his arm, and clothed in his threadbare habit and thick peasant's boots, all hats were raised and every head inclined before him.

Very soon those who censured the Curé of Ars were able to see for themselves, what emotion the sight of his well-known habit awakened wherever he passed. One day in 1822, to quote this anecdote among a hundred others, M. Vianney entered the *Petit Séminaire* of Meximieux where he was going to see the Superior, M. Loras, his former fellow-student. It was during the recreation time. Scarcely had he set foot in the courtyard, relates a witness in the process of beatification, than all the games ceased and a religious silence prevailed. "What is it?" asked some one. "It is

Monsieur le Curé d'Ars," was the answer, and that explained everything.

He soon had no bed, or, at least, he had only the semblance of one. Detesting above all the affectation of virtue, he loved to quote the example of St Charles Borromée who, far from publishing his austerities, appeared to live as a man of his rank; he had indeed a fine Cardinal's bed which every one could see, but by the side of it was another, made of faggots, and it was this latter that he used. M. Vianney did exactly as St Charles had done. But as he was not a cardinal, it was the same bed which gave his visitors the illusion that he had a comfortable couch, which served him as an instrument of penitence. When this bed was covered with sheets, it did not attract any notice. But the mattress having migrated to some sick person, and the bolster having speedily followed, there was nothing under the sheets to rest his head on but a little straw, and a very thin mattress laid on faggots for his body. This is what Marguerite Vianney and Madame Bibost discovered in the course of their visit. Obliged to leave them alone for a moment, M. Vianney had told them that his room was done, and that they need not go into it. However, they went up, and suspecting the mortifications which he practised, they opened the bed, but quickly remade it, fearing to vex the holy man.

As M. Vianney did his room himself, and no one but he slept at the Presbytery, his parishioners never knew anything of his austerities except through indiscreet persons. But when their curiosity

was aroused, in order to satisfy it they exercised a real espionage, and got to know that their curé scourged himself like a Trappist, often slept on the floor of his barn with a stone for his pillow, and imposed terrible fasts on himself.

Later on, his assistant-priest, when questioning him as to this period of his life, spread a snare for him, into which he naïvely fell. "Monsieur le Curé, they say that formerly you could easily remain for a week without food." "Oh no, my friend, they have exaggerated, the most I have done is to go for a week with three meals only."

He offered all these mortifications to God for the salvation of his parishioners, multiplying and increasing them when he had some great favour to ask, for instance when Easter approached, when he had discovered an abuse to reform, when he wished to snatch hardened sinners from their bad habits, or after their conversion to expiate their faults and obtain their perseverance.

To prayer, he added fasting, according to the divine precept. At two o'clock, he had risen and recited the office of the night, and he afterwards began praying. At four o'clock he was in church in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. He did not leave it till noon, having spent the morning in catechising and saying his Mass, in making his preparation and afterwards his thanksgiving. And throughout the day there was a series of pious practices, such as a "Hail Mary" at each fresh hour. He had vowed to do this, and to meditate, while reading the different parts of his office, on the

Passion of Jesus Christ, and then there were continual invocations to God, to whom everything led him back, the grain they were sowing, the bird singing, the bush flowering. What could Heaven deny to such ardent love?

"Oh how many graces our Lord granted me at that time," he one day confessed, when speaking of the five or six first years of his apostolate at Ars. "I obtained everything I wanted from Him." Now as he wished for nothing less than to bring back all his flock to the fold, he did not cease to importune our Saviour until there was not one wandering sheep left in Ars.

Even then he did not rest, but seeing that God was now loved in this little corner of the earth, his zeal felt straitened.

So he placed himself at the service of the neighbouring priests, and he it was, who took temporary duty, replaced the absent and assisted those who were ill.

Missions offered another field for his activity. And there was one in which the empire he exercised over souls was so strikingly manifested, that a change passed over his life. It was the mission given at Trévoux, in the early part of 1823, by the priests of the Chartreux Monastery. M. Balley, who conducted it, had known M. Vianney at the Seminary, and asked his help for the confessions. What attraction did these persons find who were the first to kneel at the feet of this humble country Curé? Perhaps they did not even know themselves. But they arose so consoled that they advised all their friends to go

to this source of life. Soon it was M. Vianney who confessed nearly everybody, especially those who were the most enlightened. The mission lasted five weeks, and during these five weeks, nothing was talked of at Trévoux but the extraordinary gift of insight, which the Curé d'Ars had received for the direction of consciences.

The day before the close of the mission, he remained in the Confessional for more than twenty hours. At two o'clock in the morning his host, Mr Morel, the Chief of the Institution at Trévoux, and formerly his fellow-student at Verrières, came to take him away by force, and carried him quite exhausted to his bed; two hours later the confessor was again at his post.

From that time forth the Curé of Ars was the Apostle of the Dombes and the District of the Bas Beaujolais. Every curé wanted to engage this workman who, as one of them said, did so much work and ate so little. At Montmerle, at St Trivier, at Savigneux, at Chaneins, at St-Bernard, he made them celebrate the jubilee of 1826. It is related that in this last parish, the farm-servants, whom their masters had not allowed to go on account of the press of work, offered to give up part of their wages rather than miss a single sermon of the missionary.

And such was the success of this Apostolate that troubled souls did not wait for the Apostle to go to them, but came themselves to seek him. His first pilgrims showed the way to others, soon the roads leading to Ars were thronged with people, more

than 20,000 persons [1] went there every year, after the rumour had spread of all the marvellous things which had happened there.

[1] Twenty thousand is the number given by the sub-prefect of Trévoux in the report in which he asks for the Cross of the Legion of Honour for the Curé of Ars (June 28, 1855).

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROVIDENCE OF ARS AND THE SAINT'S HEAVY TRIALS

PERHAPS no period was more interesting in the life of the Curé of Ars than the ten years in which—first from the neighbouring parishes, then from all the Lyonese district, and finally from the whole of France and even from abroad—people of every condition used to come to him to confess their sins and beg for his advice. For him this was a time of great favours and, as these always demand their price, it was also one of special trial; it was then that he became a saint in the true acceptation of the word. But of no other period do we possess such scanty details, so that we can only sum up, at the same time verifying their facts, what his first historians have written.

Many of the events, which during these ten years give such marvellous significance to his life, relate to the creation and development of an Orphanage called the Providence, which he founded at Ars.

For him this work was the realisation of a two-fold wish.

His own unsatisfactory studies had caused him so much suffering that he was keenly alive to the problem of popular education. Soon after his

arrival at Ars (this interesting and little known fact we learn from the journal of Mlle. d'Ars) he liberally distributed books, thinking that he could give nothing better than a little knowledge. But this kind of alms was useless in most houses; for at Ars, as in other country districts at that time, the people were quite ignorant, and so it became one of M. Vianney's dreams to open free schools in his parish.

Again while journeying through the Dombes, when replacing those of his fellow-priests who were ill, he formed another wish. In the farms of this great insalubrious plain, where the tillers of the soil are soon worn out, he met many children who had neither father nor mother, and found others abandoned by their parents. This state of things troubled him greatly, and when he remembered that Saint Vincent de Paul had, like him, been a country curé in this very district, he no doubt prayed to this good patron of orphans, to inspire him with the means of rescuing some of these poor children from misery, especially the girls, they being the most exposed.

He never crossed the village square without casting envious eyes on a house which, by its cleanly appearance, seemed to him very suitable for a girls' school and an orphanage.

In spite of his great wish to purchase it, he would make no rash decision. He reflected over it for some time and prayed much. But when it seemed to him that his plan was feasible, he bought the house he had so much coveted. It is a mistake to say,

as some have done, that on this occasion he sold the property which he possessed at Dardilly: for he never possessed any property whatsoever, having received as his share of the paternal inheritance an annuity of three hundred francs, which was regularly paid to him until his death. It is possible, that in order to acquire the house for the Providence, (as he named it,) he may have mortgaged his pension for some years in advance.

Now that a dwelling had been found, persons were needed to direct it. M. Vianney came to a decision which appeared very strange to many of his colleagues. But, as he at times received intuitions concerning the future, perhaps it was intended that he should show to the curés, who should live half a century later, what they could do when deprived of their usual helpers. Instead then of asking help from a Religious Order, he turned to his lay parishioners.[1] Among them he chose two young girls, Benoîte Lardet and Catherine Lassagne, who were distinguished for their virtues, and, by what was also essential in his eyes, their good common sense.

He sent them for a year to the Sisters at Fareins so that they might get some insight into the management of a school, then recalling them to Ars, he

[1] Some widow ladies having founded at Lyons a hospital for Incurables, under the name of the *Oeuvre des Dames du Calvaire*, —one of the finest works originated by Lyonese charity—inquired of the Curé d'Ars if they should adopt a religious habit. He advised them, not only to remain lay helpers, but, because they were women of the world, to "*faire un peu de toilette.*"

confided to them the direction of his Orphanage, without however binding them by any vows.

They fully justified his confidence. As he expressed it, Benoite was the head and Catherine the heart.

A companion was soon given to the two Directresses, Jeanne Marie Chaney, who was especially charged with the rough work of the household. The beginnings were very modest. First of all a free school was opened for the little girls. Afterwards the children of the neighbouring parishes were received as far as there was room for them, on condition that they should be boarded at their expense. As it was specially intended for poor orphans, two or three were received as soon as possible. The number gradually increased with the resources. Soon there was not enough room, and it was necessary to build, and M. Vianney, who had done the work of a carpenter in restoring the stalls of his church, wished to work with his own hands in enlarging the Orphanage. He made the mortar, and gave his aid in sawing, and in carrying the stones.

As soon as the house was finished it was filled, and for nearly a quarter of a century it remained full. The number of boarders was not limited. All who presented themselves were admitted, but young girls from fifteen to eighteen, who had until then vegetated in ignorance and misery, were the most welcome.

Many younger ones were also received, and never sent away until after they had made their First Communion.

This Providence of Ars was a house conducted on quite an original plan. The same room served as refectory, school-room and work-room. The garden in which they took their recreation was planted with cabbages for the soup. There was no uniform; the children had the clothes they were wearing on their entrance, or that were sent them by charitable persons. Nor was there any uniformity in their training, each one received the instruction appropriate to her gifts. Most of the orphans only learnt to read, write, count, sew, knit, and to wash and mend linen. This was all in fact which was necessary for them in order to make good farm servants, which was their usual lot when they left the Home, towards their twentieth year.

Sometimes they were younger when they first went to service, but if so, they went only for the summer months. In the winter they returned to the Providence, where they found rest for body and mind. Later on many of them married, while others became nuns. In both cases it was M. Vianney who acted a father's part, and it was he who gave them their trousseau, paid their expenses, made all the arrangements; it was he who advised and encouraged them; it was to him they turned in all their difficulties.

The Providence was closely linked to his apostolate. If he had any special grace to ask, he at once set the orphans to pray, convinced that their youth and poverty were two titles which rendered them all-powerful with heaven. It was for them that he instituted those famous Catechizings, which were later on to begin or decide so many conversions.

Every day after the dinner of the Community was over, he entered the one room, which served also as refectory, and seating himself without ceremony on the edge of the table, while the children grouped themselves round him, he would talk to them for an hour. Before this audience which did not intimidate him, he dared to speak without any preparation, and also to say things just as they came to him; thus he lost the artificial and laboured style which he had till then cultivated. He was himself and his speech, as we shall endeavour to show later on, was full of colour and unction. Little by little, strangers were allowed to join the audience. Their numbers always increasing, it was necessary to hold the meetings in the church. There the eloquence of the Catechist did not change, but was characterised by the same simplicity and naïveté as in the atmosphere in which it had first been developed. And this was the way in which the orphans of the Providence rewarded M. Vianney in return for the benefits with which he loaded them; he gave them bread for their bodies and food for their souls, while they contributed, little as he suspected it, to make him one of the most interesting orators of his time.

The work flourished for twenty-five years, depending chiefly on daily offerings from the charitable. In the beginning M. Vianney, with a little money which he had collected, bought some land for the benefit of the orphans, and at first saw to its cultivation, but as he had no time to look after it properly, he let it for a yearly rental to the Comte de Cibeins. At the same time this revenue was quite insufficient to

provide for sixty to eighty young country girls, blessed with good appetites, and M. Vianney was obliged to trust to Divine Providence—and Providence never forgot all he had done to give a shelter to these homeless children. It showed itself inexhaustibly liberal to him, just as it had been to St Gaëtan and St Vincent de Paul, as indeed it is to every saint who is inspired by heroic love for the poor; it sent him, through a hundred mysterious channels, all that he needed for his work.

On one occasion he had to pay for a great quantity of wheat, and as his creditor had already granted him a long delay, he could not ask him to extend it. He therefore took his stick, and set out for the country reciting his rosary as he went. At the end of the wood which bounds the parish of Ars, a woman stopped him: "Are you the Curé of Ars?" "Yes, my good woman." "Here is some money which I was told to give you." "Is it for Masses?" "No, only your prayers are asked for," so saying the woman went away without giving any name, and the wheat was paid.

Another day M. Vianney said to the Abbé Tailhades, who had been helping him for several months, as we shall explain further on, "I am very worried, I owe more than 3000 francs. Ah! one should be careful not to get into debt!" . . . "Allons, Monsieur le Curé," replied his listener, "do not fear; the bon Dieu will settle all that." The next day when the catechising was over, the Curé d'Ars, after having exchanged a few words with the Abbé, said to him: "I must leave you, I am going to count my money."

A moment afterwards he rejoined him feeling quite happy. "Well," said he, "we are now quite rich; this morning I was rolling in money. The weight of it was so heavy that I could scarcely walk. My pockets were bulging out, I was obliged to hold them with both hands." When the Abbé Tailhades asked him where he had found so much money, he simply answered: "Oh! I found it somewhere." Doubtless his benefactors had asked him not to give their names. Perhaps even he did not know them, for often truly Christian hands poured their alms into his; they did not wish to be known even to him, and, too modest himself not to love modesty in others, he never sought to discover who it was, when he was not spontaneously told the source of the generosity of which he was made the instrument.

Thus at each moment Providence sent him by discreet messengers the money which he needed. So in spite of his humility, when one reminded him of all these benefits, he could not help saying: "Yes, we are really the spoilt children of the *bon Dieu*."

But did not God bestow on him still more marked signs of His affection? Did He not do for him what He does in general for the great heroes of charity? In order to show that the work undertaken was after His own heart, was He not willing sometimes to come to His aid while dispensing with all human agency? This is beyond doubt.

Among the facts quoted, there is one which was much talked of. The Curé d'Ars, who never spoke of any other miraculous intervention in his favour, has, on the contrary, several times related the above, be-

cause in the depths of his humility, he saw in it, not a reward for his charity, but rather a punishment for his want of faith. This, according to his own recital, is what happened.

There was no more bread, neither was there any corn or money. M. Vianney vainly solicited help from those persons who usually came to his aid in his difficulties. They were at the end of their resources, or else their generosity was exhausted. He believed himself forsaken by God, and felt more unhappy than he had ever been in his life before, except once, and that was when, after having begun his studies, he had despaired of ever finishing them. In his grief he remembered that in that moment of distress he had had recourse, and with success to the protection of St Francis Regis. So he took the relics of the Saint, went up into his granary, and hid the reliquary in the handful of grain which remained.

The next day the Directresses of the "Providence" came to tell him they had nothing left to eat. "We must send our poor children away then," he answered, weeping; then he went slowly up to his granary, accompanied by Jeanne-Marie-Chaney, and anxiously opened the door. The granary was full!

If one of the signs by which one may recognise the sanctity of a man is the humility of his attitude before any special mark of the Divine favour, the Curé d'Ars plainly showed at this moment that he was really a saint. Overjoyed as he was that he would now have enough to provide for his family, he yet hung down his head like a naughty child. He went himself to carry the news to the orphans, and

far from boasting of it, as of a fact which showed how highly God esteemed his virtues, his recital resembled a confession. "I mistrusted the 'bon Dieu,' my dear little ones," he said to them. "I was going to send you away, and He gave me a good lesson, so I have been well punished." We can easily imagine the saint was the only one to think that he had received such a reproof.

The whole parish went up to see the corn, and the event caused an enormous sensation in the neighbourhood.

Some years after Monseigneur Devie, the Bishop of Belley, being at Ars, asked to visit the presbytery. He entered the granary without any ceremony, and putting his hand casually against the wall said in a most natural tone: "Did the corn come up as far as this?"—"No, Monseigneur," answered M. Vianney, who did not understand the object of the question. "It was up to there," pointing much higher. The Bishop descended without making any observation; he regarded the Curé d'Ars as a saint and feared to offend his humility. He had simply wished to have from his own lips the avowal of the extraordinary fact, of which so many persons had told him.

Great graces in the life of a saint do not come without great trials, which accompany or more frequently precede them, and certainly Providence dealt out suffering to M. Vianney with no niggard hand. For nearly ten years he was criticised, insulted, suspected, calumniated and threatened with the utmost violence. In fact everything within the range of possibility was done to make him

weary of his saintly habits, shackle his apostolate, and ruin his good works.

The first attacks came from his own brethren. Whilst he had merely preached missions in their churches, or acted as their substitute in times of illness, they had never been able to find strong enough terms in praise of his zeal. But when they saw their parishioners flocking to him in crowds, then that same zeal appeared to them most injudicious, and they began to murmur.

What indeed! Was he, an ignorant priest, about to contend for the direction of the souls which had been confided to them? Did not everyone know that he had had the greatest difficulty in the world to master a little Latin, and that he had barely escaped being sent away from the *Grand Séminaire*? Besides, did not their dealings with certain amongst the frequenters of Ars amply suffice to confirm their apprehensions?

They were no longer docile; and, in opposition to the counsels of their usual confessor, they obstinately invoked the opinion of the Curé d'Ars. And then, what an extraordinary existence was his! In what period did he imagine he was living? Did he not see that, in this cynical age of mockers, the excess of his austerities would not only cause the shrugging of shoulders, but would compromise the reputation of the clergy! And then, what was one to think of his orphanage, where nothing happened as it did elsewhere, but everything was left to Providence, with a temerity bordering on folly!

This is what was currently said in the presbyteries of *la Bresse*, and jealousy was not always the sole inspirer of these comments.

The memory of M. Vianney's scholastic failures—still fresh in the minds of his fellow students—the contempt with which he invariably spoke of himself, and the silence he kept about the success of his apostolate, were all factors contributing to his prejudice. But a greater one than all these was the injudicious enthusiasm, with which persons of an exuberant imagination extolled the virtues of the new saint.

Many of his detractors disparaged him in perfect good faith, and with all the more ardour because they believed that, in so doing, they were rendering a signal service to heaven.

Nor were they content with words only; that which his fellow priests had said at first, half-jestingly among themselves, was very soon repeated as sober fact to the faithful, and curés forbade their parishioners to go to confession at Ars, threatening to refuse them absolution if they did so; also many of them pointed out, in their sermons, the dangers of an unenlightened direction.

"Those were the days," said M. Vianney later on, when speaking of those years of persecution, "in which in their pulpits, and everywhere else, they left the Gospel on one side, and took the poor Curé d'Ars for their text."

As their preaching did not produce the desired effect, they resolved to stop the ever increasing stream of pilgrims by appealing to diocesan authority.

From divers quarters the Bishop of Belley[1] received very malevolent reports of the Curé d'Ars. Several of the influential curés even deemed it a duty to league together, and send him a collective letter, denouncing the injudicious zeal of one of his priests, whose incapacity was exposing the Faith to grave perils.

Meanwhile M. Vianney was not unaware of what was being said and plotted against him. Some brother priest, thinking to do him a kindness, came in person to tell him; others merely wrote about it. When a united attempt was made to induce the bishop to remove him from his cure, the fact was at once communicated to him, in an official letter of inconceivable harshness.

He was not at all surprised to be judged so severely, for the worst that any one could possibly say of him could not equal the evil he thought of himself; and he had not the slightest doubt that the threatened disgrace was close at hand. He even expected still more rigorous treatment, "to be interdicted by his bishop, to be hunted from his cure by his parishioners armed with sticks." "It seemed to me," he said later on, "that every one ought to have made sport of me for having dared to live so long in a parish, where I was an obstacle to good."

But, though he thought thus, his tender and loving heart suffered cruelly from so mortifying a trial,

[1] The See of Belley, suppressed by the Concordat, had been restored in 1823, and since that date, the Curé d'Ars had ceased to belong to the Diocese of Lyons.

coming as it did from his own brethren. He accepted it, however, with perfect resignation, happy that the disdain of his peers would deliver him from the fear he had lest he might feel exalted when crowds bowed down to receive his benediction; and happier still, that he was able to say to himself, "The cross is a gift of God to His friends."[1]

Long afterwards, when he spoke of crosses in his catechisings, it was understood that his thoughts went back to those sad years in his life. Sometimes he even made direct allusions to them. "We must ask to love crosses," he said one day, "then they will become sweet. This was my experience for four or five years (the trial was especially painful for four or five years, but did not last less than ten). I was slandered, contradicted, criticised without mercy. Oh! I had crosses—almost more than I could bear. Then I began to pray for the love of crosses, and was happy. I said to myself, 'there is really no happiness but in that.' One must never consider the quarter whence crosses come to us. They come from God. It is always God who gives us this means of proving our love to Him."[1]

The Curé d'Ars did not exaggerate when he said that he had almost more crosses than he could bear, for the world soon joined his brethren in persecuting him; and, at that time, he was exposed not only to the prejudices of jealousy, but to the slanders of a hatred that baffles explanation. His first accusers had scoffed at his ignorance, the new ones did not

[1] *Esprit du Curé d'Ars*, a Catechism on Suffering.

hesitate to question his morality. He received anonymous letters reproaching him in odious terms for all kinds of infamous actions. In the morning when he opened the door of his presbytery, he found libels posted upon it, which accused him of having spent the night in debauch, whereas the greater part of it had been devoted to prayer; and which shamelessly attributed to a bad life, the deep lines with which penitence had furrowed his brow.

These shameless tormentors found grace in his eyes; he pardoned and excused them. He was quite aware that they were slandering him, and grieved that they should sin against God by their untruths; but he did not think them to be altogether wicked: in his opinion, although they did not adhere to the strict truth, still they were not wrong in asserting him to be worthless. He rejoiced in all that God permitted them to say against him, "seeing in the condemnation of the world the blessing promised by heaven." The contempt with which he was overwhelmed served him as a safeguard against the temptation of taking delight in the compliments of others; and he found consolation in the thought that his bishop, on seeing him "trodden under foot like dirt"—to use his own expression—would have no compunction in treating him as he deserved, *i.e.* in ejecting him from his cure.

But the most admirable feature in his conduct was, that these unjust attacks did not slacken his zeal even for an instant; nor did any of his labours ever suffer from the anguish with which he was tortured. He preached, confessed, gave counsel

with as much diligence as in the past, and, on seeing him so scrupulously fulfilling the duties of his office, nobody could have suspected he was constantly accusing himself in his heart of being unworthy to fulfil them. To one who asked him, later on, how he had been able, during this long continued storm, to preserve the tranquillity of soul necessary to the discharge of his duties, he replied, "One serves God better by doing things in which one takes neither pleasure nor delight. It is true I hoped every day that they would come and turn me out, but, in the meantime, I acted as if I should never have to go away at all."

This serenity appears still more admirable when one knows that the persecutions of men did not exempt him from infernal obsession.[1]

Let us at once apprise those, who may be tempted to doubt and smile on reading the following pages, that they will not be the first to do so; nor will they think or say anything that our hero's contemporaries

[1] It has been remarked, that if all the saints have a share of suffering allotted to them as a means of purification and perfection, the shares are, at least, very appropriately distributed; to apostles, like St Francis Régis, who live amongst men to convert them, persecutions from men; to hermits, like St Anthony, who live in solitude for the advancement of their own souls, diabolical persecutions. These latter were not spared the Curé d'Ars, although he was in reality an apostle of men. The reason of this cannot be doubted, his apostolate was exercised under conditions not incompatible with certain habits in the life of a recluse: an apostle by day, was not this heroic curé a veritable hermit at night? Moreover, his diabolical persecutions were not of the same character as those of the great hermits; they tended chiefly to thwart his apostolate.

did not think or say, in his life-time, and the clergy with more animus than the rest. For the rumour that the Curé d'Ars was visited by demons, was no sooner noised abroad, than it was greeted by an outburst of laughter in all the neighbouring presbyteries. It was not long before his good brethren came to demonstrate to him, that he was but a dreamer, with a diseased imagination and a disordered brain; and that the den, from which his demons issued, was none other than the pot in which he left his potatoes to grow mouldy. "My dear curé," they said to him, "live like everybody else; feed better, your head will get all right again, and the devils will leave you in peace."

But the persecutions lasted thirty-five years.

M. Vianney's own confidences have made it an easy task for his biographers to describe the torments of this long martyrdom: they have only to repeat what he has himself recounted a thousand times. There was, in fact, no other subject on which the Curé d'Ars spoke so freely, for he was as willing to avow what he supposed would humiliate him, as he was to be silent on all that could bring him esteem. What then were the joys of his inner life? We scarcely know: for he never made any but obscure and rare allusions to them, although—seeing nothing that could in any way redound to his honour—he answered, without hesitation, all questions put to him upon the subject of the diabolical persecutions. "The devil," remarked one of his assistants one day to him, "leaves *us* quiet enough." "That is because you are so good!"

replied M. Vianney. This remark explains his avowals.

It is from his own accounts then we learn how this great trial began, and the tortures it caused him to suffer.

He had many and strong internal temptations to despair. He continually pictured to himself his past faults, and his present imperfections; he saw heaven shut against him, and hell open; and his apostolate appeared quite barren. These thoughts were all the more painful to him, because his faith never wavered for an instant during the whole of his life, and he never had even the shadow of a doubt about the existence of that Paradise to which, he imagined, he could never attain. They were all the more dangerous because they tended to paralyse his zeal, which, without his understanding how, was already doing immense good. But, as these temptations failed to disgust him with his duties, the demon made use of other means.

Far from being that weak-minded person, which his brethren had conjured up, the Curé d'Ars was naturally so little inclined to credulity that, at first, he had no idea he was beset by devils: and not until the failure of every rational explanation, to account for the strange noises that disturbed his nights, did he at all suspect the nature of their origin.

One evening he heard a violent knocking at his door. He opened his window and asked, "Who is there?" Nobody replied. The noise being repeated, this time at the door of his staircase, he again said,

"Who is there?" and, as before, received no reply. Now as the Vicomte d'Ars had lately given him some magnificent ornaments for his church, which he kept for safety in his presbytery, he imagined the noises must be caused by thieves attempting to break in to steal them. He therefore thought it best to take precautions, and asked some brave men to mount guard. They came several nights in succession, heard the noises, but discovered nothing. They watched also in the belfry, but without any success: a great hubbub was heard, but nothing was seen. The watchers were much frightened, and so also was the Curé d'Ars himself. However, one wintry night, having again heard a great banging at his door, he jumped out of bed in hot haste, and ran down into the yard convinced, that if these disturbers of his peace were men, they must, this time, leave footprints in the freshly fallen snow, by which they could be tracked and caught. But he neither saw nor heard anyone, nor was there trace or mark of any footstep whatsoever in the snow; from this time he no longer doubted his persecutor was the devil.

If the special aim of these obsessions was to terrify him, they signally failed in their object. Our hero, it is true, was very much terrified when he thought he had to do with men: but it was a strange fact—thought quite consistent with his character—the moment he was convinced that the disturbers of his nights were demons, he was much less afraid.

Besides—and of this there can be no doubt—the great end of his enemies was to render his apostolate less fruitful, by preventing his tired body and jaded

brain from renewing their strength. In fact, all these persecutions were artfully contrived to render sleep impossible. The most frequent of the nocturnal noises was one of those monotonous sounds, calculated more than anything else, as all the world knows, to induce insomnia; and, for fear lest he should become accustomed to them, the noises generally varied in character from night to night. Sometimes they sounded like a plank being sawn, or bored for screws; sometimes like nails being hammered in, one after the other. Or else it seemed to him that regiments were defiling before his door, that a flock of sheep were trampling about in the room overhead, that a horse was galloping over his flagstones, that fingers were drumming on his table, his chimney-piece or his water jug, that a barrel was being hooped with iron close beside him, that all the carriages in Lyons were rolling over his floors, and that a clamorous assembly was disputing in an unknown tongue in his court-yard. This last mentioned obsession continued many consecutive nights, and he compared the dialect of the demons, who held their parliament—as he called it—in his court-yard, to that of the Austrians, whom he had met on his journey to Grenoble, when he went to be ordained as priest. At other times his door would open with a bang, and a voice would roughly apostrophise him by his family name. Then he would have to endure a volley of scornful epithets, the one most in vogue being, "*mangeur de truffes*," *truffe* being the name given to the potato by the peasants in the Province of Lyonnais. After this

his furniture was rattled about, and his curtains were shaken with such violence that it was a continual marvel to him that nothing was broken or injured. Several times he was actually jerked out of bed.

It is to be regretted that, whilst so naïvely describing the different phases of this terrible torture,—this deprivation of "nature's sweet restorer" at the very moment he most needed it—the Curé d'Ars gave no account whatever of the resignation with which he supported it. But, if he was lavish in his confidences about the assaults to which he was subjected, he was sparing in those concerning the doughty defence he opposed to them. However, from some avowals, which inadvertently escaped his humility, we know that his patience, surpassing heroism and verging on the sublime, was sometimes rewarded by a sudden cessation of the persecution. Thus, as he has himself related, one night when the demon was tormenting him more than usual, he cried out from the depths of his heart, "My God! I will gladly sacrifice to Thee one hour of sleep for the conversion of sinners," and lo, there was a sudden and profound silence. One conjectures also that, like St Theresa, and many other saints subject to the same mortifications, he sometimes disarmed the "*Grappin*," as he ironically called his persecutor, by defying him. Once, when he said, "I will go down yonder [meaning to his orphanage, the Providence] and tell them of thine intrigues, so that they may all laugh at thee," the persecutions instantly ceased. Sometimes, in order to tax his

long-suffering patience beyond its utmost limits, the demon would vainly try to irritate or grieve him, by direct attacks on objects dear to his heart, for instance by defiling a holy picture that he loved, or some such impious act. But, in spite even of this, the holy curé still continued unmurmuringly to submit to the ordeal of being heavy with sleep, without being allowed to close his eyes.

A coincidence, which he soon noticed, was a great consolation to him; it was this: the persecutions recommenced or redoubled their violence whenever some great sinner was on his way to Ars. So it came to pass that he felt real joy when they began again, after an interval of respite, hailing them as a sign that his nights of suffering would soon be followed by a wonderful conversion; and he was not mistaken.

During the last years of his life, these persecutions became rarer and rarer, till, in the end, his nights were no more troubled. If he was tormented it was only during the hour of repose, which he was obliged to take after his mid-day meal. They did not entirely cease until six months before his death.

The persecutions, to which he was subjected by men, ended much sooner.

The very arm, with which his detractors hoped to strike him, was used in his defence. The Bishop of Belley, Mgr. Devie, had too much good sense and kindness of heart to sacrifice one of his priests, without having made the very strictest inquiries about his ministry, and his private life.

The Vicars General both went to Ars, questioned

M. Vianney, saw him at work, and discovered nothing worthy of blame in him. He was, nevertheless, asked to submit to the Council of the Bishopric, all the difficult cases that he might meet with in his Apostolate. He docilely complied with this request, and soon sent more than two hundred. Mgr. Devie, who examined them himself, acknowledged that except in two individual cases—in which his own judgment would have differed slightly—the curé's decisions had been irreproachable. After that, he no longer permitted them to treat as incapable, a confessor, who had solved such a great number of difficult problems with such unerring judgment. The next time they did so in his presence, he warmly protested, saying, "I do not know whether M. le Curé d'Ars is learned, but I know that he is enlightened."

Reassured as to the competency of the poor priest, against whom they had tried to prejudice him, Mgr. Devie was still more quickly satisfied as regards his virtue. A few interviews sufficed to edify him. He found a saint, where they had told him he would find an object of ridicule. And ever afterwards he openly defended that piety and those mortifications, which he so often heard derided. "Sirs," he said one day at a meeting, in a tone which put an end to joking, "I wish you a little of that folly you are scoffing at, it would not hurt your wisdom." Another day he spoke again of the Curé d'Ars with the most profound respect, and ended very gravely as if he wished his words to be repeated, "Yes, sirs, he is a saint! A saint whom we ought to admire and take

as a model." This remark, as the bishop no doubt intended, went the round of the diocese, and stopped all tongues, at least in public.

But it was more the ascendency of M. Vianney's virtue, than the protection of his bishop, which gradually influenced people in his favour. The Abbé Monnin recounts a very significant anecdote. The Curé d'Ars had received a letter from a brother priest, which began thus: "M. le Curé, when one knows as little theology as you, one ought never to enter a confessional." The rest was in the same strain. M. Vianney, who scarcely ever found time to answer the innumerable letters addressed to him, answered this one at once. "Oh! what reason have I to love you, my dear and venerated brother; you are the only one who really knows me! Since you are so kind and charitable as to deign to take interest in my poor soul, do help me to obtain what I have so long demanded, so that, being replaced in a post my ignorance makes me unworthy to occupy, I may withdraw to some retired spot, to mourn over *ma pauvre vie*." The sequel was worthy of this beginning. Confounded by so much humility, the author of this insolent letter went to beg his pardon.

Thus almost all the priests, who blamed the Curé d'Ars were, one after the other, converted by him into admirers and friends. Moved by curiosity they had sought to enter into rather intimate relations with him, and thus their prejudices were dissipated. After a few visits to Ars, sometimes only one, they returned home softened by his goodness, and ashamed of their own blindness. In a few years,

M. Vianney had no more enemies amongst the clergy. Little by little the world itself ceased, if not its jests at his expense, at least its slanders.

There was yet one more trial for him, which must almost have broken his heart: the Providence was suppressed.

His work continued to prosper, for the number of boarders was never less than sixty, and the country people came in crowds wanting them as servants. Its future appeared secure: for, seeing that the first Directresses were growing old, M. Vianney had chosen two young girls, the sisters Villiat, whom he was having instructed to succeed them. But his efforts were unable to save his dear Home from the attacks to which it was exposed on every side. The academic administration condemned it, as being neither a school nor an orphanage; the clergy, because of its lay direction; and several inhabitants of the village complained of having their daughters educated with beggars. What else did they not find to say? And what did they not criticise? The clothes, the rule, the studies, the age at which the children were received. Before this chorus of complaints, echoed by the diocesan authority itself, M. Vianney thought he ought not to hold out. In the month of November 1847, in the presence of one of the Vicars General, he gave up the Orphans' Home, with the Chapel he was having built for them, to the Superior General of the Sisters of St Joseph de Bourg. The Orphanage was suppressed, and, in its place, a boarding school was established by the new Directresses.

They still kept up the free school for the little girls of the parish—M. Vianney insisting upon this. Thus a part of his work was continued, and by no means the most insignificant. To complete it, he tried to secure the same advantage for the little boys. As his parishioners enthusiastically responded to his appeal, and he was generously aided by the Comte des Garets, Mayor of the Commune, and heir to M. and Mlle. d'Ars, he was able to open a free school for boys, March 12th 1849. He had confided the direction of it to the Institute of the Brothers of the Holy Family at Belley.

He was very soon on intimate terms with two of the masters of the new school. Frère Jérôme, whom M. Vianney called his comrade, and Frère Athanase, who often acted as his secretary, and who, after having been one of the witnesses in the process, had the joy of assisting at the solemn ceremony of the Beatification of his friend. Frère Jérôme, who scarcely ever left him, was both his sacristan and his body-guard, protecting him with his strong arms from the pressure of the eager crowds. It was he who arrayed him each morning in his sacerdotal vestments, and it was he who clothed him for his burial.[1]

From the year 1849 primary instruction was therefore gratuitously given to all the children of Ars; and it was to the intelligent initiative of the unlearned curé, whom the world had so derided, that this small village owed the inestimable advantage,

[1] The life of Frère Jérôme has been written by Mlle. Marie des Garets d'Ars. Bourg, printing office, Villefranche.

which made it fifty years in advance of most other French villages.

The establishment of a free school for boys consoled M. Vianney somewhat for the loss of his orphans. But the suppression of the Orphanage was, none the less, a bitter grief to him; in fact the bitterest in his life.

Nothing could have affected him so deeply as the destruction of this work, which he had conceived and built up entirely himself, formed after his own image, endowed with his money and all the affections of his heart; and whose maintenance had made daily demands on his foresight and energy, for a quarter of a century. He submitted, however, to this cruel blow without a murmur, because he thought God had done well to strike him thus, if, by this means, the last vestiges of his self-love were destroyed. According to Catherine Lassagne's memorandum about the event from which she herself also suffered, this was certainly the personal opinion of the saintly priest. "Blessed be God for all!" she wrote. "It is He who has thus willed it, without doubt, to detach His servant still more from the satisfaction he might have had even in doing good."[1]

[1] It was not long before Catherine Lassagne, discerning that she was living near a saint, began to write a diary, relating all she saw, and all the confidences she received from him. After the suppression of the Providence, she served M. Vianney as much as he would allow any one to serve him, and continued her journal about the extraordinary life she had the privilege of witnessing. Her companion, Benoite Lardet, did not have the sorrow of seeing the suppression of the work she had helped to create.

Thus did the Curé d'Ars recognise the will of God in a misfortune, in which no one else would have seen anything but the malevolence of man. Nor was he wrong; for the rest of his life shows that, if the sacrifice imposed on him was to serve for his sanctification, by completing his detachment from self, it was also required by the marvellous growth and development of the pilgrimage. Certainly the work they caused him to suppress had, for a long time, singularly contributed to the success of his apostolate. It was in the humble room of the Providence he had become that original orator, whose words had such irresistible charm. And then, what sad secrets he had learned about the human heart, whilst directing the young girls, who had many of them been led astray through a vagabond life! Lastly, although he perhaps said it especially that they might think his own prayers worth nothing, he had doubtless reason to affirm that a great number of sinners had owed, to the prayers of these children, the secret inspiration which had led them to Ars to confess their sins.

But the rôle of the Curé d'Ars was not to direct a Charitable Institution, it was to convert and enlighten souls. And it was this rôle, which now sufficed to engross all the resources of his mind and heart, and every moment of his time. Already in

After having governed her little family with great wisdom for some years, she died peacefully, transported with joy at the thought of going to see the good God, and not understanding how they could pity her for dying before she was old: "Would you like me then," she said to her sister, "to remain in this world? I could never feel at home in it."

1835, Mgr. Devie had forbidden him henceforth to assist at the pastoral retreats: "What are you doing here?" he asked. "Do you not know that souls are waiting for you yonder?" Twelve years later there was no question of finding a few days in a year, the Curé d'Ars could not even get two hours a day—I do not mean for repose or recreation but—for any other work than confessing, advising, and catechising. Souls then resorted to him in such numbers, so eager for pardon and counsel, that he could no longer profitably engage in any other labour, without prejudice to the great work which was demanded of him. And soon his bishop, finding it necessary to come to his assistance, put the whole cohort of diocesan missionaries at his disposal.

## CHAPTER V

### ATTEMPTS AT FLIGHT. HIS FELLOW-LABOURERS

IN order, later on, not to interrupt the description of the pilgrimage, several events, separated in reality by a series of years, have been placed together in the following chapter, and the reader will see that they mutually explain each other.

The first time M. Vianney thought of giving up his parochial work was—although the exact date is unknown—soon after his arrival in Ars. He went to Lyons, to the Capuchin Friars in the district of Brotteaux, and asked for admission. Père Léonard, after having listened to the recital of his difficulties, used his authority in counselling him to remain a curé. "Your place is not amongst us," he said. "Only, since you love our Order, I will make you a member of the Third Order of St Francis," and he sent him back to his parish. M. Vianney therefore resumed his labours. But when to the burden of administering his little parish, was added that of directing the many souls that flocked to him from every quarter, he was afraid of a charge which, while seeming to him beyond his powers of mind and body, did not leave him sufficient time for prayer. He therefore persuaded himself that it would be better to retire to a hermitage. One evening, the date of

which he did not mention in his account of this attempt at flight—it was towards 1840—he quitted his parish, and had got as far as the cross of the Combes on the way to Villefranche, when suddenly he stopped, and asked himself this question, "Am I really fulfilling the will of God at this moment? Is not the conversion of one soul of more value than all the prayers I could make in solitude?" Thereupon he at once retraced his steps, and returned home, saying, "I will go on till I succumb."

Three years later he very nearly did succumb. Then he regarded the illness, which had prostrated him, as an indication of Providence that he was right to give up his work, nay more, that it was perhaps even his duty to do so.

This was at the beginning of May, in the year 1843. Every evening during the month of May, it was his wont to give a short Instruction. On the third day, just as he had begun to speak, he was taken so ill, that he was obliged to quit the pulpit and go to bed. He was found to be suffering from a serious attack of pneumonia. During the next few days he was much worse; the fever never left him, and syncope after syncope followed each other in quick succession. Three doctors met in consultation, and pronounced that there was scarcely any hope.

The whole parish was in tears. "You cannot form any idea," wrote Mme. la Comtesse des Garets, in a letter dated May the 10th, 1843, "of the touching and pious spectacle, that has been before our eyes ever since the beginning of the saintly man's illness.

One sees nothing but tears, hears nothing but prayers and sobs. The church, which seems desolate without him, is nevertheless continually filled with weeping crowds, imploring Heaven with heart and soul, by prayers, and acts of naïve faith, and touching piety. . . . Candles are burning on every altar, rosaries are in every hand. During the first few days guardians were obliged to be placed at the presbytery door, to keep back the eager crowd that besieged it, entreating to see the venerable curé once more, and receive his last benediction. They could only calm this fervour, by giving notice each time the saint, rising in his bed of suffering, would give a general benediction."

M. Vianney's Confessor was of opinion that the last Sacraments ought to be administered. As the doctors had recommended that he should be spared all strong emotion, the priests who were present at Ars, agreed that the bell should not be rung. The curé overheard their conversation, and turning to the person at his bedside said: "Go, and have the bells rung; ought not the parishioners to pray for their curé?"

At the first deep tones of the bell the houses were deserted as if by magic, and the whole of the parish accompanied the Viaticum to the threshold of the presbytery. The priests, Count Prosper des Garets, his two sons, and a few other privileged persons, entered the sick-chamber, whilst the crowd knelt in the court-yard of the house, and in the village square, weeping and praying.

When M. Vianney was asked if he believed all the

truths of religion, he answered: "I have never doubted one"; if he pardoned his enemies: "Thanks be to God, I have never wished evil to any one."

As this ceremony is described in the letter of the Countess des Garets just quoted, bearing the date of the 10th of May, it no doubt took place upon that or the preceding day.

The next morning the doctor approaching the sick man felt his pulse, and then, believing him to be past hearing, said aloud, "He has only a few minutes to live."

The dying man distinctly heard the fiat that condemned him; and, being seized with awe and terror of the Judgment, earnestly prayed to God that He would grant him a reprieve, and delay the awful moment yet a little while.

Four months later he himself described the anguish of this tragic moment to his family, when he was once more at Dardilly, in their midst. "Be sure, cousin," he said to Mme. Fayolle of Ecully, "when you assist the dying by fortifying and preparing them to appear before God, that you never cease your exhortations until they have actually departed. For this is what happened a little while ago to me, whom all gave up for dead, and abandoned, without so much as a word of comfort, because they were so certain that my last hour had come. I was in mortal dread of the Judgment of God when the doctor, after feeling my pulse, said, "He has only a few minutes more to live." On hearing these words I thought, "In a few minutes thou wilt appear before God: and—with empty hands." Then, at

the remembrance of the many persons, who had come from so far off to make their confessions, and who were imploring the Holy Virgin and St Philomena for me with all their hearts, I said within myself: "Lord! if thou canst still use me do not yet take me from this world." And even as I spoke, I felt my vigour renewed; and all my strength returned."

At the exact moment that M. Vianney was so miraculously restored to life, a Mass was being said on his behalf at the altar of St Philomena. Pertinant, the parish schoolmaster—who never left the sick man night or day—was at his bed-side, and distinctly saw reflected on his face the emotions —to him inexplicable—of the drama which was being enacted in his soul. In his deposition, in the process of Beatification, he relates, "Before the priest had begun to offer the Holy Sacrifice, M. Vianney's attitude appeared to me to be that of a person in mortal terror. I noticed something extraordinary in him, great anxiety, unusual perturbation. I observed all his movements with redoubled attention, thinking the fatal hour had come, and that he was about to breathe his last. But as soon as the priest was at the Altar he suddenly became tranquil. It was as if he saw something pleasant and reassuring; and the Mass was scarcely over when he exclaimed, 'My friend! a great change has just been wrought in me. . . . I am cured.'"

From this moment in fact the disease left him, and, little by little, his strength came back, so that on Friday, the 19th, he was able to be carried to

church as convalescent. There he fell on his knees before the Tabernacle, no doubt consecrating to the Service of God the years of life that remained to him.

Then he went and prayed for a long while, in the Chapel of his favourite little saint, to whose intercession, as he declared, his recovery was due.

The first Mass that he celebrated was a great fête, and the rejoicings were prolonged for eight days. Supported by Pertinant, he went to Church between midnight and one o'clock, since his forces were too impaired to permit of his fasting until morning. As he entered the Church the bell was rung, and the whole population of Ars hastened to assist at this nocturnal Mass. The season of the year seemed changed: it was no more the day after the Ascension, for all the inhabitants of Ars, with one accord, were transported to Christmas Eve. Their faces beamed with joy, and their eyes were never weary of gazing at their curé.

But their happiness knew no bounds, when they again heard his voice, speaking, according to his own wish, first of all to his children of the Catechism.

This joy, however, was short-lived; for very soon a rumour spread that they were about to lose, whilst still living, him whose resurrection they had just celebrated; and this rumour was only too well-founded. The Curé d'Ars had asked for life to prepare for death. It seemed to him that his illness had put an end to his apostolate; and that heaven, in restoring his health, had left him at liberty to take refuge in solitude.

He therefore naturally thought himself quite freed from his duties towards his parishioners, when Mgr. Devie sent him a fellow-helper.

As early as the year 1839 the Abbé Tailhades, a priest of the diocese of Montpellier, had helped him occasionally for three or four months together. Having come on a pilgrimage, he had been so attracted by the charm of M. Vianney's saintliness, and the desire to be of service to him, that he had remained a short while. The aid that this chance collaborator had rendered, convinced the Curé d'Ars that a *vicaire* would be very useful to him; and from that time he expressed a wish to have one.

After his serious illness Mgr. Devie sent him the Abbé Raymond, Curé de Savigneux, who was his sole auxiliary for ten years. M. Vianney had a great affection for this young priest, who had several times solicited the honour of being associated with the holy curé in his ministry.

When the latter saw a young, active, zealous man arrive in Ars, who seemed his superior in every respect, he thought that the parish would be much benefited if he abandoned the direction of it to him, so he decided to bury himself in some remote and solitary place for the rest of "his poor life" as he called it.

It was on the eve of the 12th of September that his project was put into execution. He had never spoken about it to anyone, except the night before, when he had mentioned it to the Directresses of the Providence, under the seal of secrecy. But somehow or other the secret leaked out, and the news

spread like wild-fire. There was great excitement in the village; men went to and fro making inquiries; they concerted together, they mounted guard. Night came, but all was still; nothing unusual occurred. Suddenly, between two and three o'clock in the morning, a faint glimmer appeared in the darkness; and by its feeble light, M. le Curé was seen quietly stealing out of his back door. Some of the watchers tried to stop him, but he broke from them and ran away; and when they gave chase, he redoubled his speed, and, diving into a bye-path, escaped from his pursuers, accompanied however by the faithful Pertinant. Almost breathless and with blistered feet, he reached his father's house at Dardilly, after seven hours of flight. There he remained concealed, and his poor parishioners were at a loss to know what had become of him.

At once, inverting the rôles in the parable, according to the happy expression of Madame des Garets, "the sheep went in search of their shepherd." The Comte des Garets went to look for him at Dardilly; not finding him, although he was there, he wrote him a most sorrowful letter. Catherine Lassagne let him know that the Providence was almost empty, but that there were still fifteen little ones left. The innkeeper of the village, fearing that he had displeased him, and thinking he had in some way contributed to his flight, sent him a touching message: "Monsieur, I beg of you not to forsake us. You know that I have always told you, and I repeat it at this moment with all my heart, that if there is anything in my

house you do not approve of, I put myself entirely at your disposal."

These letters made a strong impression on M. Vianney, and his resolution was already shaken. Very soon after he had proof that no hiding-place was sufficiently secure, and that wherever he fled the pilgrims would always manage to find him.

Even as soon as the 15th, as less precautions were taken at Dardilly to conceal him, he was besieged by visitors. Those pilgrims who had tracked him to his hiding-place begged him to hear the end of their confessions, and he was obliged to ask the Archbishop for powers. Then, too, all his relations from Dardilly and Ecully hastened to visit him.

On Sunday the 17th, crowds of people came from Lyons to see him, and, when it was known that he was still with his family, a part of the population of Ars went to Dardilly.

Thus M. Vianney had only succeeded in changing the place of pilgrimage, and was it simply to secure such a result that he had taken flight? This was the question which he asked himself when he was joined by the Abbé Raymond, who brought him a letter from the bishop. Mgr. Devie would not consent to the good curé leaving his diocese—he would have considered it too great a loss—but he offered to let him retire to Nôtre Dame de Beaumont, at the same time hoping that he would return to Ars.

On the 17th of September M. Vianney left Dardilly at a very early hour, having taken great precautions that his departure should pass unperceived, for it was now the people of Dardilly who

mounted guard over his person, hoping to inherit the treasure of which Ars was deprived. He rejoined M. Raymond who was waiting for him, and the two priests set out together towards Beaumont.

On their way they passed before a church, which they entered and knelt down to recite a part of their office. When they rose from their knees, the church was full of worshippers. The curé had been recognised, and immediately a crowd had assembled. Although he tried to escape from the pilgrims, wherever he stopped the pilgrimage was formed anew.

M. Raymond then told him that he could not send these good people away without having given them some spiritual sustenance, so M. Vianney resigned himself, and spoke to them with marvellous power.

In the evening, the two travellers stopped not far from Beaumont. On the next day they said their Mass in the ancient sanctuary of Nôtre Dame. They were making their thanksgiving, when, all at once M. Vianney, leaning towards the Abbé Raymond, said to him in a resolute tone: "Let us return to Ars."

They immediately went on to Savigneux. From there, while he was taking a moment's rest, M. Raymond despatched a messenger to the inhabitants of Ars, to say that their curé was about to return to them. In an instant everyone gathered in the market-place. At first they refused to believe the good news. They inquired as to its source, and insisted on seeing the person who had brought it. When they were at last convinced that it was indeed

true, they hastily called together all those who were working in the fields. Then they ran to the château to tell the mayor; they despatched scouts on the road to Savigneux, and gathered in crowds at the entrance of the village. At last, a great cry was raised, "There he is," and soon a wonderful spectacle was seen. The people were all crying, laughing, kneeling down to kiss his hands, and touch the border of his cassock. He smiled, and blessed them, saying gently, "Was everything lost then? Nay, now all is found."

He embraced the Comte des Garets with transport, and in his person all the parishioners; and, after making the tour of the square, leaning on the arm of the Abbé Raymond, he entered the church to the joyous peals of bells.

The next day he resumed his chain, and the village of Ars, which for weeks had been a veritable desert, recovered its wonderful animation.

Ten years later the same alarm was again felt, for M. Vianney, having received some new helpers, imagined that his parish no longer needed him.

In 1863 two distinguished priests, the Abbé Mury and the Abbé Convert, had founded a little society of diocesan missionaries. This good work answered so well to the needs of the time, that its founders had immediately so much to do, and did it with such zeal, that after only seven years of apostolate, they both succumbed within an interval of six months. The direction of the Society was then confided to the Abbé Camelet, who changed its seat from Bourg to Pont-d'Ain. A close friendship soon sprang up

between him and the Abbé Vianney. Indeed, no work could be more sympathetic to the Curé d'Ars than that of the diocesan missions; they reminded him of those early times of his apostolic life, which had always remained so dear to his heart. He helped M. Camelet by his counsels, prayers and money. When he was told of a parish in which there was little faith, he quickly collected a sum of two thousand francs which he sent to the funds of the diocese, on condition that every ten years a mission should be given in this parish. By these means a decennial mission was assured to about a hundred parishes.

Knowing that the missionary-priests looked upon him as a father, Mgr. Devie had thought of giving them to him as fellow-helpers. His successor, Mgr. Chalandon, put this project into execution.

At first only one missionary-priest came to settle permanently near the Curé d'Ars; this was the Abbé Toccanier, but, as soon as they were needed, others hastened to rejoin him. All the members of the society thus resided more or less at Ars. Among them must be mentioned the Abbé Monnin, who afterwards wrote the life of M. Vianney.

The harmony between the Curé d'Ars and the missionaries was always so perfect that after his death they were made the guardians of his tomb; and it was the Abbé Camelet, the Superior of the Society, who was the first, after M. Vianney, to bear the title of Curé d'Ars.

The Abbé Toccanier, who was one of the principal witnesses in the process of Beatification, soon inspired the holy curé with unlimited confidence,

and received from him most touching marks of sympathy.

One day, when he returned to Ars after a long absence, M. Vianney welcomed him with outstretched arms: "Ah! mon cher ami, there you are! How glad I am! I have often thought how unhappy the damned must be to be separated from God, since one suffers so much from the absence of those one loves."

But when this vicaire, of whom he soon became so fond, was first sent to him, he met him with a certain reserve and anxiety. This was because he meditated another flight.

On Sunday, September 3rd 1853, the day following the installation of his colleague, M. Vianney went to see Catherine Lassagne and Jeanne Filiat, who had worked for him since the suppression of the Providence, and announced to them that he was going to leave Ars that evening. He begged them to keep the secret, but, as had happened ten years previously, his intention became known.

At midnight, when he opened his door, he found on the threshold the Abbé Toccanier with Brother Athanasius and Brother Jerome of the Sainte Famille. Brother Athanasius threatened him with ringing the tocsin. "Very well, do so," he answered briefly, "and let me pass." The Abbé Toccanier remonstrated with him, but as all words seemed useless he bethought himself of taking away his breviary, and M. Vianney was obliged to go back to the presbytery to fetch the book which he thought he had forgotten. Once there, the missionary suddenly showed him

the portrait of Mgr. Devie. "M. le Curé," said he, "look at Mgr. Devie. I am sure that at this moment he is looking at you reproachfully. If one ought to respect a bishop's wishes during his life, one certainly ought to do so still more after his death. Remember what he told you ten years ago." M. Vianney appeared touched, but he was not convinced; he stammered: "Monseigneur will not scold me. He knows how much I need to weep over my poor life."

The Comte des Garets who arrived at this moment was not more successful. M. Vianney scarcely listened to him, answered him sharply, and deaf to all entreaties, made his way through the crowd which thronged his staircase.

In the street a strange sight awaited him. The tocsin had roused the whole village, and the men, thinking that there was a fire, had brought pails of water. Others moved by the fear of some unknown danger came armed with sticks, scythes, and even guns. The words, "Monsieur le Curé," "Monsieur le Curé," continually repeated, reminded them of his flight ten years ago, and at length, understanding what was the matter, they all cried out with one voice, "Stay with us."

"This appeared to me a favourable moment," relates the Abbé Toccanier, who has left us a detailed recital of the event; "to make a last effort, I fervently addressed him in words inspired by God. I cannot recall all of them, and can only remember these: 'Ah, Monsieur le Curé, you who know so much about the lives of the Saints, have you forgotten the perseverance and generous zeal of St

Martin, who, with his crown already in his grasp, cried, '*Non recusa laborem*'? and would you leave the furrow before your day's task is done? Have you also forgotten the words of St Philip Neri, 'If I were already at the gates of Paradise, and a sinner demanded the help of my ministry, I would leave all the heavenly court to go and hear him'?—and you, Monsieur le Curé, would you have the courage to leave unheard the confessions of these poor sinners, who have come to you from so far? Are you not responsible for their souls before God?"

These vehement words provoked a torrent of tears and complaints. The parishioners and the pilgrims surrounded M. Vianney, compelled him to walk, and led him to the church.

He went to the Sanctuary, and, prostrating himself, prayed and wept for a long time, then passed into the sacristy for a few moments' conversation with the Comte des Garets, after which he re-entered the church, where an anxious crowd was watching all his movements, and went straight to his confessional.

The next day some persons who had influence over him begged him to abandon his plan, still he would promise nothing. But during the days following, God made him understand by extraordinary favours that he was pleased with him for having sacrificed his love of solitude to the salvation of souls; and, when the Abbé Toccanier plied him with questions in order to know the motive of his departure, he at length answered that he had wanted to gain an advantage over the bon Dieu, and now he was able to say to Him: "If I die a curé, it is Thou who hast so willed it."

If his plan of flight had succeeded, he would have put himself under the direction of the Founder of the Marists, Père Colin, one of his old fellow-students for whom he had always cherished great affection. The latter had founded, a year before, at Nôtre Dame de la Neylière (Rhône) a kind of mitigated Order of Trappists, and also an *Œuvre* for the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It was there that the Curé d'Ars was to have retired. His room had been prepared, and he was expected, when they learned that his parishioners had succeeded in keeping him with them.

This attempt to become a Religious ended like the one which preceded it. When prevented from being a Marist, he became an associate of the Third Order of Mary, and when he renounced all idea of becoming a Capuchin, he was admitted into the Third Order of St Francis. One could at that time belong to more than one of the Third Orders.

M. Vianney never again attempted to give up his ministry, and less than two years later, having undertaken a journey in order to satisfy the demands of fraternal piety, he saw in the obstacles which prevented him from finishing it, a new proof that Providence would not allow him to interrupt his laborious task even for one day.

On January 26th 1855, his brother Francis lay dying, and his nephew Antoine came to fetch him. He set out in a carriage accompanied by the latter, the Abbé Toccanier and Brother Jerome. After they had gone a very short distance he became indisposed and attacked with vomiting. This obliged him to get

out and walk four or five kilometres, leaning on a vine-prop, for which he had paid forty sous to a passer-by, having forbidden them to cut him a stick from the hedge, saying it would be a theft. At Parcieux he declared that he could go no further.

They therefore turned back, while the Abbé Toccanier went on in the direction of Dardilly to carry to the dying man, the benediction and last messages of his brother. At the hill of Trévoux they met the omnibus which was coming back from Ars. The pilgrims, on recognising M. Vianney, all descended from the omnibus, and accompanied him back to the door of his church.

He did not again leave Ars, which for more than four years longer continued to be the scene of this extraordinary pilgrimage that occupies such a great place in the history of the Catholic Church in France in the nineteenth century, and gives so original an aspect to the life we are relating. It was certainly not the first time that our country had seen a man, in return for his unbounded humility and piety, and in sign of his supernatural mission, acquire an immense ascendency over souls and even over the powers of nature. Still it was many years since such a spectacle had been seen among us, and as the Saints themselves are not stereotyped copies of each other, so the Pilgrimage of Ars had its own individual characteristics not found elsewhere in the annals of sanctity.

We now hasten to describe its different aspects, and to explain how this holy curé attracted souls from afar in order to convert them; how he decided vocations and encouraged good works, and how he consoled and healed.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PILGRIMAGE. ITS PHYSIOGNOMY

IT was between 1825 and 1830 that the pilgrims began to find their way to Ars. Such were their numbers that it was necessary to arrange for five services of conveyances each day to take them there, and also to construct several inns where they could lodge. Even then there was sometimes not enough accommodation, in which case the village people offered their houses. It thus happened that eight or ten strangers were crowded for the night in a narrow room; and they were no more fortunate as regards their food. Persons accustomed to every kind of comfort joyfully accepted this summary hospitality. "When near the Curé d'Ars," wrote a pilgrim, "we forgot the necessities of life. Badly lodged, badly fed, obliged to rise before day-break, hurried, elbowed, pushed about, we braved cold, hunger, thirst, and sleeplessness—in fact everything; all this simply to hear a few words from the good Saint."

Pilgrims came to Ars from the most distant provinces of France, from Brittany, Béarn, Flanders, Languedoc, and even from Belgium, England, and North and South America. There one met nuns with every description of *cornettes*, and peasant women in all kinds of costumes; while the many

different kinds of head-gear reminded one of a fair day at St Jean de Maurienne. But this was not all. Before the delighted eyes of the inhabitants of Ars, who were in nowise astonished to see men of talent, power, fortune and high birth, come and bow down to sanctity, passed in endless procession bishops (among whom were Cardinal Bonald and Mgr. Dupanloup), Heads of various Orders, Generals, Prefects and Professors of the University, merchants, bankers, and men bearing ancient and honoured names. Fathers brought their children to Ars; the heads of Institutions their pupils; curés led thither a great part of their parish. When a pilgrim returned home his accounts at once caused others to set out, and thus the chain was never broken; yet it was only maintained by these oral accounts, for neither newspapers nor books contributed until his death to spread the fame of the Curé d'Ars.

As soon as a pilgrim had entered Villefranche or Trevoux, and was in the conveyance which was to take him to the end of his journey, he heard of nothing but the Saint. On arriving at the village square he saw in all the shop windows the picture of the holy curé. Scarcely had he alighted than he would hasten to the church to have a glimpse of him, and though this might not be possible by what he saw around him he began to understand the great influence which this humble priest exercised over souls.

In the choir, fifty, sixty or even a hundred men seated in two rows, were waiting their turn to enter the sacristy. In spite of their number there was no

disorder. On their faces there was scarcely a trace of weariness and lassitude, nothing but recollectedness and fervour, or perhaps the anxiety of an uneasy conscience. If they were asked how long they had been there, most of them answered: "Since two o'clock this morning," or, "Since midnight when M. le Curé opened the church." Some of them explained that they had been there since the evening before, and that in order to keep their turn they had slept in the vestibule of the church. The new-comer would then be quite amazed to learn that men were capable of enduring sometimes a whole day and night of watching and waiting, not for the sake of being present at a spectacle, but to labour for the salvation of their souls, a thing to which men generally devote the least time and effort. He said to himself that in the little sacristy of Ars very precious counsels must be received, since men counted as nothing the fatigue, by which they were obtained.

The women were in the nave which was even more crowded. The fervour was the same, but naturally there was less order. In fact certain measures were necessary to maintain it. Some persons willingly undertook the office of *gendarmes*, keeping in their places the most impatient among the women, who being no doubt desirous of easing their consciences as soon as possible, were prone to overlook the rights of others. An iron bar shut off the chapel of St Jean the Baptist in which was the confessional, and this only allowed the penitents to pass in one after another. The spectacle of this church

filled with men and women praying, and waiting for their turn to speak to M. Vianney, lasted for several hours, for the curé confessed on an average sixteen hours a day—sometimes eighteen—never less than fifteen, for more than thirty years. But there were moments in which all the pilgrims in the church of Ars were interrupted in their solitary meditations, when all eyes were turned in the same direction, and every heart beat in unison.

At seven or eight o'clock in the morning, according to the season, M. Vianney used to say his Mass, and when he had finished he advanced to the Communion rail in order to bless the children and also the medals and rosaries, which were presented to him. As long as he remained with his face towards the people all eyes were fixed on his frail person. They looked upon his emaciated frame, and wondered how he could endure the fatigue which he had to bear. They were never tired of gazing on his face, which, in its oval form, in the shape of the forehead, in the lines of the mouth, recalled strikingly that of Voltaire, and which had however such a different expression. Above all, they tried to meet the glance of those deep eyes, which with a single flash so often penetrated the secrets of guilty consciences, or kindled the flame of repentance in the hearts of the most obdurate.

At seven o'clock in the evening M. Vianney left the sacristy where he confessed the men, and all eyes were turned to him as he ascended the pulpit, with his back slightly bent and his head down. People from the village came to join the pilgrims. Soon a

very feeble voice like a child's, and scarcely audible, commenced the night prayers. All held their breath in order to hear better; and when the curé recited the Act of the Love of God, no one could restrain his tears.

A distinguished Religious, who had been told that one could not hear the Curé d'Ars without weeping, had assisted at his catechism and been interested, edified and even touched, but without being, as he expected, overwhelmed by this popular eloquence—too strong perhaps for a refined palate. But in the evening, when pronouncing the simple words: "My God, I love Thee with all my heart," M. Vianney's voice had such a celestial accent that tears flowed from his eyes.

This Religious was however an exception, and there were few pilgrims present at the famous Catechisms who did not weep.

Just before eleven o'clock in the morning the church was always filled; all the strangers who were staying at Ars were there. M. Vianney passed through their crowded ranks, not with head bent, as in the evening, but lifted high, with eyes sparkling, Neither the number, nor the station of his audience impressed him. He, who was usually so timid, had an imperturbable assurance when preaching, so indifferent was he as to what might be thought of his eloquence.

After a few minutes of silent prayer before the Tabernacle, his only preparation, he ascended the pulpit. He first gazed round upon his audience. Sometimes he singled out one individual, and those

pilgrims who were thus noticed have owned, although it was a trial to their self-love, that by a marvellous intuition he had perfectly described their evil inclinations, exposed their weaknesses, and relieved their anguish. When he had thus taken possession of his listeners, and they had all felt the ardent glance of his flashing eyes, M. Vianney commenced. It is very difficult to-day to give an exact idea of his eloquence.

Four volumes of his sermons have been published, but they all belong to the first years of his apostolic life. They are the discourses, long prepared and painfully learnt by heart, which he gave each Sunday, before he had any other hearers but his parishioners; and many of them, at least as regards their form, have certainly only a very distant resemblance to the catechisings of the last thirty years. After 1826 he had no longer the leisure to write out a single instruction. Very soon he had no time for any other preparation than a short prayer to the Holy Spirit. At first he was very nervous at being thus dependent on his own resources, remembering that even after all the trouble he took, and when he used to devote several days to reading and writing, his memory had sometimes betrayed him. But it was quite different when he spoke from the fulness of his heart, and he unwittingly became a real orator. Of this orator the published sermons give us but a very incomplete idea.

The Abbé Monnin, who often heard him speak, has published a *résumé* of his Catechisings and homilies under the title of "L'Esprit du Curé

d'Ars," which has been made from notes taken at M. Vianney's catechisms by the young girls of the Providence, and also from the former's own recollections. Probably nothing has been altered, but many facts have been weakened. These notes are simply brief summaries, since an instruction of three quarters of an hour's duration is sometimes condensed into a few pages, which may be read in ten minutes. Still, even these are extremely precious to the biographer who wishes to understand how the words of the Curé d'Ars had such power over souls, and also to such minds as piously treasure the least word which fell from the lips of him who was so full of the love of God; in any case, it is useful to read these sermons, for it was in writing them that the orator was formed, and from time to time we have the promise of what he became later on.

The Curé d'Ars boasted neither correct syntax nor methodical composition, but it seems to me that he possessed in a remarkable degree the power of attracting attention, in itself one of the chief titles to eloquence, and often the only one of popular orators. He certainly at times sinned against the rules of grammar, but he knew how to make a pause at the right moment in order to take surer aim. Again he might be wanting in sobriety and elegance of language in developing his subject, but he knew how to vigorously underline everything of importance. No doubt he did this by such familiar formulas as: "*Tenez mes enfants, écoutez-bien çà,*" but in the way in which he used them, one recognised a man who knew how to judge, from the

countenances of his hearers, the effect produced by his words, who understood when they did not seize his meaning, and when they desired some explanation, and who with infallible tact always felt exactly when their attention was on the point of flagging. M. Vianney's vocabulary was not refined. Either he did not perceive this, or else he purposely chose, as being clearer to his listeners, those words which were most familiar to them. He constantly employed idioms, many of which though incorrect were used in the Lyonese region, but his language had one charm which neither a lettered nor an unlettered audience could resist—it was full of imagery.

The present Curé of Ars recently (1895) asked an old inhabitant of the parish what his predecessor's preaching was like. "His preaching," answered the other, "was full of comparisons."

Among these metaphors there are some which are familiar and even trivial, but others which are charming; there are certainly many which he had gathered during the time of his laborious preparation, and which may be found in the sermons of certain preachers of the beginning of the seventeenth century; again there are others which are happy memories of his life as shepherd and peasant, and which he had stored up during the course of his conversations and meditations. I do not think a great number would be worth quoting separately. What seems to me even more striking than their originality is their abundance and diversity, giving one the impression of a man who in every phase of the external world, and in all the events of life, had

never met with anything which did not remind him of God and eternity.

These images were perhaps more numerous than felicitous, when he needed to explain to his hearers, who were often ignorant, such mysteries as the work of the Holy Spirit in a soul.

"Without the Holy Spirit we are like stones on the road. Take in one hand a sponge full of water, in the other a little pebble, and squeeze them both equally. Nothing will come from the pebble, and from the sponge you will get water in abundance. The sponge is the soul filled with the Holy Spirit, and the pebble is the cold and hard heart in which the Holy Spirit does not dwell."

"The soul which possesses the Holy Spirit enjoys a sweetness in prayer which makes it find the time always too short; it never loses the feeling of God's Holy Presence. His heart before our Saviour at the Sacrament of the altar is as a bunch of grapes in the wine-press."

"The Holy Spirit is like a man who has a good horse and carriage, and wishes to take us to Paris. We have only to consent, and to get in. It would be so easy to do so. The Holy Spirit desires to lead us to heaven; we have only to say yes, and let Him guide us."

"The Holy Spirit is like a gardener who is working in the soul. The Holy Spirit is our servant."

"Here is a gun; you load it, but it needs someone to fire it off. In the same way there is in us a capability of doing good. It is the Holy Spirit who kindles in us good desires, and good works follow."

"The Holy Spirit reposes in pious souls as the dove in its nest. He broods over good desires in a pure soul as a dove over its little ones."

"The Holy Spirit leads us like a mother does her two-year old child, or, like a man who sees leading the blind."

His catechisings were always full of word pictures, when he wanted to bring home hard truths, as for instance the necessity of loving one's crosses.

"Crosses on the road to heaven are like a beautiful stone bridge over a river. Christians, who do not suffer, pass over this river on a fragile bridge, always ready to give way under their tread."

"He who does not love his crosses may perhaps be saved, but with great difficulty. He will be but a little star in the firmament of Heaven."

"He who has suffered for God will shine like a beautiful sun."

"Crosses transformed into the flames of love are like a bundle of thorns which is thrown into the fire, and reduced to ashes. The thorns are hard, but their ashes are soft."

"Put some beautiful grapes in the wine-press, and delicious juice will flow from them. The soul under the wine-press of tribulation produces a liquor which nourishes and fortifies it. When we have no crosses, we are dry; if we bear them with resignation we experience consolation, sweetness, and happiness. It is the beginning of Heaven. God, the Blessed Virgin, the angels and saints surround us. They are by our side, and watch over us. The passage from this life to the next of a good

Christian tried by affliction, is like that of a person carried upon a bed of roses."

"Thorns give forth balm, and sweetness flows from the Cross, but we must press the thorn in our hands and the Cross to our hearts so that they may distil the sweetness which they contain."

When he treated subjects which were particularly dear to his heart, such as sweetness in prayer, the orator gave full rein to his fancy:—

"Prayer is a fragrant dew, but one must pray with a pure heart in order to feel this refreshing dew."

"A sweetness is exhaled from prayer like the juice which is distilled from ripe grapes."

"Prayer purifies our soul from matter. It bears it on high as fire inflates a balloon."

"The more one prays the more one wishes to pray; like a fish which swims at first on the surface of the water, and afterwards plunges in the depths, advancing further and further. Even so does the soul plunge in an abyss, and lose itself in the sweetness of communion with God."

A truly popular orator, M. Vianney expressed all his thoughts in a concrete manner. His preaching was composed of examples, recitals and dialogues, acts witnessed, or words overheard, and of real or imaginary scenes. To quote some examples:—

"If one said to these poor lost souls who have been for a long time in hell: 'We are going to place a priest at the door; all those who wish to confess have only to go out.' My children, do you believe that a single one would remain? The most guilty of them would not be afraid to confess his sins even

before all the world. Oh how quickly hell would be deserted and heaven filled! Well, we have the time and means, but these poor lost ones have not. Besides, I am sure that these unfortunate ones when in hell exclaim: 'Cursed priest, had I never known thee, I should not have been so guilty.'"

"You see that lukewarm soul which does not hesitate to talk and interrupt its prayers upon the slightest pretext. Does it wish to offer the day to God or to say its Benedicite and Thanksgiving? It does all that, it is true, but often without thinking to whom it is speaking. It does not even cease working. If a man, he turns his cap or hat about in his hands, just as if he meant to sell it. Is it a woman? She recites them whilst cutting bread for her soup, or putting wood on the fire, or even whilst scolding her children and servants.

"Lukewarm souls do not perhaps work upon the Holy Sabbath, which persons with even a little religion consider positively forbidden; but they have no scruples whatever in making a few stitches with a needle, in arranging trifling things in the household, or even in sending herdsmen into the field during the hours of divine office under the pretext that there is not enough food for the cattle; thus they let their own souls and the souls of their servants perish also. A man will perhaps arrange his carts for the next day, visit his farms, stop a hole, cut ropes, bring his buckets and set them in order. What do you think about it, my brothers? Is not all this, alas, only too true?"

These were, in fact, homely truths, learnt during

his walks about the farms, and transported "toute pure" into his discourses by a man who knew, being from the people himself, that nothing engages their attention so much as an exact picture of life.

His action was even more persuasive than his speech. Those who heard him only on the eve of his death, when he had lost his teeth, and spoke, sitting in a chair placed against the High Altar, could not judge what he was in his prime. Then he always went into the pulpit, and all his being seemed instinct with eloquence. His hand struck the edge of the pulpit; his body seemed to lift itself in the air, as if the ground would have burnt his feet; his words came rushing forth in a torrent, as if it were beyond his power to keep back the truths which were brimming over from his heart. His eyes were constantly bathed in tears. At certain moments his arms dropped against his sides, his bosom was oppressed, and he was almost suffocated; his zeal had exhausted him. But that powerlessness to say as much as he felt achieved his victory.

His subjects were always those comprised in Christian Doctrine. But the most characteristic thing in his preaching was that from all subjects, however remote they might be, he always knew how, with swift-winged flight, to return to fundamental truths, and bring his listener once more face to face with death and eternity. Also, ever and anon, he came back to the necessity of loving God; to the invincible force one draws from His love, as natural to man as song is to birds; to the ineffable joys tasted therein, and the unutterable

anguish of the damned, who are deprived of it. The more he advanced in years, the more did the sum and substance of his teaching centre in these words, "My children, love the good God—He is so good. . . . Love Him with all your hearts." One day when someone told him what pleasure he had felt on hearing him speak on this subject, he naïvely replied: "It is because the love of God is my especial business."

Such was this truly evangelical preaching, the most effectual heard from any pulpit in the nineteenth century, to which Lacordaire himself came one day to render homage. The meeting between the two orators took place on May 3rd 1845. The next day they preached, each in the presence of the other. In the morning at the Mass, the country curé began an apology for speaking before the great orator of Nôtre-Dame. But he spoke of the Holy Spirit, and made it clear that the eloquence of the visible preacher is of little consequence, if the hearers know how to listen to the voice of the Invisible One speaking within their hearts. This was said with so much authority and unction that nobody—Lacordaire least of all—dreamt of questioning the eloquence of the Curé of Ars: each one being occupied in examining himself and in asking if *he* had always listened in a right spirit to the Word of God. At vespers, the illustrious orator apologised for being obliged to speak, in a place to which he had come only to ask for counsel. This he said with perfect modesty and great simplicity. The inhabitants of Ars were very proud that their curé should receive such praise from such lips. He himself apprehended

one thing only, that the most admired preacher of his day had made a great act of faith and humility in coming to Ars, and he rejoiced without any thought of priding himself upon it.

After this memorable visit, the pilgrims listened with added deference to a voice to which they knew Lacordaire had paid such earnest and thoughtful attention; and the eleven o'clock instructions were better attended and more fruitful than ever.

Every day between half-past eleven and twelve o'clock, whilst M. Vianney was descending from the pulpit, all the audience rushed out of the church, and remained grouped together on the road he had to pass in going to the Presbytery or the Providence. The same eager crowds awaited him on his return. The curé did not like these public marks of veneration, and tried at first to escape. But he quickly resigned himself to submit to them, since this short transit would afford him the opportunity of giving counsel and consolation to many.

Almost before he appeared in sight the unanimous shout of "Here he is" resounded. As he passed every head bent to receive his Benediction, and many a hand sought to take his. Cripples showed him their withered limbs, the unfortunate filled his ears with their tales of woe, and penitents did not blush to accuse themselves openly of their baseness. Everyone called him "father."

He was also besieged with questions, often very naïvely put, though generally serious in their object; they were perhaps about the conversion of a husband, the perseverance of a son, or the healing of a daughter.

Some, however, were prompted by very material anxieties. It even happened, on certain occasions, that silly or impertinent persons dared to come to this man, all-engrossed as he was with eternal things, and consult him on frivolous matters.

He went slowly from one to another, admirable both in patience and readiness of wit. The importunate were dismissed with a cold, sometimes an ironical word. "My father, let me say only one word to you." "My daughter, you have just said nearly twenty." The thoughtless, who only solicited direction to spare themselves the trouble of reflecting, were referred, as they merited, to their catechism. But all serious care, all unfeigned grief, met with tender sympathy. All really disquieted souls received counsels appropriate to their state, and all those who needed a longer interview obtained the promise of one. Pure hearts were recognised at the first glance, and affectionately asked not to take a particle of time from a confessor whose sixteen to eighteen hours daily audience barely allowed him time to attend to the claims of the most needy. For instance in the case of a Sister of Charity, one of our dearest relatives who was beside her, saw her blessed and then dismissed, with the parental words, "Go away, my little one, you have no need of me."

Many pilgrims did not approach M. Vianney, nor did he speak a word in private with them, except for one moment, on the village square. And yet they brought back with them from their journey impressions, which sweetened and edified the rest of their

lives. To be fortified in the Faith, or turned into the way of righteousness, it had sufficed them to feel the hands of the saintly priest placed for an instant on their brow, to assist at the never-to-be forgotten sight of his triumphal passage through the crowd, to see his confessional besieged by an army of people of all ranks and conditions, to hear him recite the evening prayers with the fervour of an angel, and preach the word of God in the manner of the Apostles. With those who were able to kneel at his feet and reveal the inmost depths of their hearts, his influence was still stronger. But it was to hardened sinners, to men with tormented consciences, to souls uncertain of their way, that God had given him a special mission.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PILGRIMAGE. THE CONVERSIONS

"LET us pray for the conversion of sinners," the Curé d'Ars was fond of saying. "It is the most beautiful and useful of prayers, for the righteous are on the road to heaven, the souls in purgatory are sure to enter there! . . . But the poor sinners, the poor sinners! . . . How many souls we may convert by our prayers! . . . All devotions are good, but there are none better than that."

He himself prayed unceasingly, and made all around him pray for the conversion of sinners, and it was that which brought thousands of them to kneel before him in confession.

Catherine Lassagne, endeavouring to explain the origin of the pilgrimage, writes in her notes: "But that which increased the influx of visitors more than anything else was the prayers of the Curé d'Ars for the conversion of sinners. The grace which he obtained was so powerful that it sought them out without leaving them an instance of repose.

One could not give a more appropriate summary of the apostolic life of the Curé d'Ars than that of this simple peasant. He was so zealous for the salvation of souls that, in order that none of his time might be lost, he was not obliged to go and seek

for them; grace sent them to him, without leaving either him or them a moment's repose. The history of the saints does not offer us any other example of an apostolate carried on under similar conditions. For more than thirty years the Curé d'Ars laboured thus for the conversion of sinners, and would willingly have toiled still longer.

"M. le Curé," said the Abbé Toccanier one day to him, "if the bon Dieu gave you the choice of going to heaven this very moment, or of remaining on earth to labour for the conversion of sinners, which would you do?"

"I think I should remain."

"Is it possible? The Saints are so happy in heaven; no more temptations, no more sufferings!"

"That is true, the Saints are well off—they have nothing to do. They cannot glorify God like us by labour, suffering and sacrifice for the salvation of souls."

"Would you then remain on earth until the end of the world?"

"Yes, I would."

He never felt the least pride in the sublime mission which was the reward of his zeal. His humility, incredible as it may seem, was thereby increased a hundredfold, for he was quite persuaded that God, who chooses to accomplish His designs with feeble instruments, had chosen him because there was no worse. "The good God who has need of nobody," he said one day, "makes use of me for this great work, although I am only an ignorant priest. If He had by Him a more miserable instrument

ready, He would have made use of it, and would have done a hundred times better work." He said the same day: "One will never know in this world how many sinners have found their salvation at Ars."

It is indeed impossible to give any approximate figure of the conversions which took place through the ministry of the Curé D'Ars. One can only try and explain how sinners were usually brought to him, and how he received them.

Many fell at his feet quite prepared for the conquest which he was to make of their soul. For some time past they had been living bad lives, but one day their conscience had made itself heard; and filled with remorse they had set out for this little village in the Dombes, where they had been told that they would find a good priest to whom it would be easy to confess.

So it was with that waggoner, who, in the early days of the pilgrimage, arrived with his waggon in the middle of the night in the village square, and went and knocked vigorously at M. le Curé's door, calling to him to come down. The astonished curé did not at first answer, but after a fresh summons he opened his door and found himself face to face with a big jovial fellow, who said to him: "Come to the church, it is all right; I wish to confess and at once." "Come then, my friend," answered M. Vianney. He confessed the man, embraced him, and seeing he had a very bad cold, gave him some shoes and stockings.

With such souls who came to him spontaneously

the apostle's task was made easy. A word murmured in their ear, an arm affectionately thrown round their neck, was sufficient to make their words gush forth and to awaken repentance in their hearts. Soon the penitent arose with a radiant face, and he sometimes manifested his joy in the most naïve manner.

The Curé d'Ars was fond of quoting the words that an honest fellow, whom he had recently converted, said to him one day: "Oh, my father, how happy I am! I would not for a hundred francs have not confessed. Until now I felt a void here," pointing to his heart. "You have filled this gap; I do not feel it any more; nothing is wanting; all is full."

If at times repentance seemed tardy, the Saint had a way of saying things which no one could resist. One day, one of these half-contrite sinners was astonished to see his confessor weeping abundantly. "Why are you weeping thus, my father?" "I am weeping because you do not weep." These words melted the ice, and the penitent burst into tears.

With a great number of sinners the work of grace was not so easy. These had not come to Ars to confess. Some of them had only yielded to the persuasions of a wife or daughter, who had long prayed in secret for their conversion. It may have happened that one day she asked him to accompany her to Ars, hoping that he would return reconciled with God; and out of complaisance he had consented to accompany her. Most of them had been impelled by curiosity to see the man to whom such miracles

were attributed, and in many cases this curiosity was anything but sympathetic. Sometimes it had even been profoundly hostile. Some of them had boasted of unmasking the thaumaturgus. Others, without doubting his good faith, had flattered themselves they would be able to prove from a living example that religion had no other foundation than the credulity of the simple. But they were taken in their own snares, for their curiosity was a bait by which grace attracted them into the net of this great fisher of men.

When these *esprits forts* had entered the little church at Ars, they were very soon convinced that no farce was being played. When once they had seen the Abbé Vianney, they had no longer any desire to compare him to a charlatan, and thus many of them began to feel very interested in what was taking place. They desired to look into things more closely; they questioned this one and that one; they assisted at the Mass, at the 11 o'clock instruction, and at the evening prayer; they tried to meet M. le Curé on the village square. Having come for a few hours they remained several days, and ended by ranking themselves among those who were waiting their turn to confess. They did not breathe in vain the atmosphere which pervaded the village of Ars.

For others—and these were numerous—a more direct appeal to God was necessary.

If M. Vianney was never a *semeur d'idées* he soon became a very penetrating psychologist. His youth had been spent not at college, but in the village, in living rather than in studying, and the practical

theology, which he had learnt with M. Balley, had already sharpened the acute spirit of observation which was natural to him. After he had begun to hear a hundred confessions daily, the weaknesses of the poor human heart held no longer any secret for him. At the first word he understood all, and foresaw so easily what one was going to say that the confession was made without any effort. But as a complement to these natural gifts, which did not always suffice, although in many cases they greatly helped him, and in order that no excuse might be left to the sinners who might come to Ars to go away unconverted, he received, like St Vincent Ferrier, the gift of reading consciences as though they were an open book. Every day one saw him suddenly go out of the sacristy or the confessional, and beckon to a person who had just entered the church. It was always someone who could not wait, or was particularly in need of compassion. A great number of penitents owned that he had recalled to them faults they had forgotten, or of which they were ashamed. In some cases he made the confession himself. When one said to him: "I have not confessed for a long time, perhaps for thirty years," he often answered: "My friend, it is exactly so many years, and it was in such and such circumstances, as you will remember."

Thus armed with this extraordinary gift, added to his profound knowledge of the human heart, he did not hesitate to accost the undecided and the stubborn. As if he guessed their unwillingness he sometimes

gave them in passing a glance which penetrated their hearts. At other times he went and took them by the hand, and led them to his confessional. There, if they still resisted, he revealed so much of their past that they were conquered.

It would be very difficult to give a detailed and complete account of these conversions which caused men, who had been led to M. Vianney out of more or less benevolent curiosity, to return to their homes completely changed. Many went away without any one knowing more than that they were converted, and that their hearts were overflowing with joy; but others were less discreet, and judging from the disclosures which they made, prompted by their gratitude, one may imagine how those, who remained silent, were brought back to God.

Among the many conversions, which might be related here, are some which we have chosen because we have had them from a particularly worthy source.

In 1852 François Dorel, painter and plasterer at Ville-franche-sur-Saôn, was thirty-two years old, and had long forgotten the way to church. "Let us go to Ars to-morrow," said one of his friends one day. "We shall see this famous curé who confesses night and day."

"Do you perhaps wish to confess?"

"Why not?"

"Well, do as you like. Let us go, and while you are confessing I shall go shooting."

The next day François Dorel took his dog and gun, not so much for shooting, as to avoid looking

like a pilgrim, and the two friends set out on their way.

They arrived at Ars just at the moment when M. Vianney was crossing the square in the midst of the kneeling crowd, so they approached and looked on. Meanwhile the holy priest had advanced slowly, and found himself face to face with François. Casting a rapid glance at the dog, which was a beautiful beast, and another at the man, he said: "Monsieur, it is to be hoped that your soul is as beautiful as your dog." François Dorel blushed and hung down his head. A moment later he was confessing and shedding abundant tears. That same year he set out for the Trappe d'Aiguebelle, where he took the vows under the name of Frère Arsène, and died on the 18th of December 1888.

It was also at la Trappe that Antoine Saubin went to expiate the sins of his youth, after having been converted at Ars. He was a bootmaker at Lyons. He had been piously brought up by his mother, but she died when he was fifteen years old, and less than a year after he had given up all his religious practices. However, he did not quite lose his faith. Remembering his pious youth he desired to be converted, but had not the courage; and at twenty-seven years of age he ended by trying to find in spiritualism, something to satisfy the hunger for supernatural things with which he was tormented. That which he was shown caused him great trouble. Night and day he was haunted by terrifying visions. As he then spoke of going to Ars his friends sought to deter him, alleging the multitude of pilgrims and the

little chance there was of his being received. This was in 1859, a few months before the death of M. Vianney, and access to him was more difficult than ever. Saubin decided however to make the journey. "If the Curé d'Ars," he said, "is a clairvoyant, as they pretend, he will guess my needs and know my great anxiety." In fact scarcely had he arrived when the curé, who was kneeling in the chapel of St Philomena, turned round and signed to him that he would be at his disposal. Some minutes later he received him, heard the history of his life, made an appointment with him for the next day, and promised him that, at the second interview, the visions which troubled him would disappear. He then ordered him to go and confess at Nôtre Dame de Fourvières.

The pilgrim followed this counsel, regained his peace of mind, and afterwards set out for the Trappe of Nôtre Dame des Neiges in the department of Ardêche.

When Mgr. de Langalerie founded the Trappe of Nôtre Dame des Neiges, the little colony, chosen to go and take possession of the pestilential domain, where it was to be decimated by malarial fever, until it had reclaimed the land and made it healthy, stopped on its way at the tomb of the Curé d'Ars. Antoine Saubin, now Frère Joachim, was one of the colonists, who related the history of his conversion to the missionaries of Ars, and added that many of his comrades having by his advice made a voyage there, had been converted.

Antoine Saubin and François Dorel were illiterate

men, but the person of whom we are about to speak was on the contrary highly educated.

He was a Voltairean like so many others of his time, of loose morals but quick intelligence, and was fond of maintaining that religion was simply an invention of cunning priests. He did not, however, hinder his wife from going to Mass, nor even to confession, under the pretext that religion was necessary for women and for the common people. At the same time he did not spare her any of those witticisms by which freethinkers love to assert their mental superiority. She bore his conduct with patience, and met his scorn with invariable gentleness.

One day she begged him to accompany her to Ars. He consented, for he was delighted to go and amuse himself at the expense of a foolish multitude who let itself be deceived by the proceedings of an old charlatan — for so he called M. Vianney.

Arrived at Ars, he went to the little church, which he found crowded. He at once began staring with scornful pity at the men and women who were waiting their turn to enter the confessional. It is always, thought he, the *vile pecus* of the poet, the credulous and unreasoning multitude, which is at the mercy of any clever comedian. Can this priest really be in good faith? "Who knows? It is certain that he is an ignorant, unlettered, and simple man. What can he reveal to this gaping crowd?" While he was meditating on this problem M. Vianney came out of his confessional, and with an imperious gesture

invited him to follow him to the sacristy. Astonished and embarrassed the sceptic obeyed; but on the latter making him a sign to kneel down he remonstrated, saying he would not confess for he had no faith. "Kneel down," answered M. Vianney, looking steadfastly at him. Under this ardent glance the recalcitrant fell on his knees. At once the holy curé, who had probed the very depths of his conscience, made him tell his sins. He recalled every circumstance of them, stated the facts precisely, even to the smallest detail, and drew from him the avowal that all was indeed quite true. The light of faith was at once restored to the sinner, who had just humiliated himself, and who exclaimed amidst his sobs: "My God, I believe, I adore Thee, I love Thee, and ask Thee for pardon."

When saying to him: "Go and sin no more," the confessor added: "*Mon ami*, hold yourself in readiness, the *bon Dieu* will soon call you to Himself."

He followed this counsel, and it was well he did so, for two years later, while walking on the Quai Bercy in Paris he fell, struck down by cerebral congestion. His widow feared for his salvation, but the Curé d'Ars re-assured her: "Your husband is saved," he said to her, "but it is necessary to pray much for the salvation of his soul."

This soul had given way at the first attack. Others were slower in submitting.

For more than two years Madame N. had vainly wept and prayed for the conversion of her husband. Business having called the latter to Lyons, his wife

accompanied him, and on his return journey, in order to give her pleasure, he took her to Ars.

She had an interview with M. Vianney, and on going back to the hotel, said to her husband, "*Mon ami*, you really ought to go and see the good curé. He is an extraordinary man, quite like a saint of former times. You would be pleased to know him." M. N. willingly consented to make the acquaintance of a man who was so much talked of.

On being introduced into his presence he saluted him respectfully, and made some flattering remarks on his great reputation. M. Vianney blushed nervously, and spoke on indifferent topics. But when his visitor rose to leave, he recalled him with a decided gesture: "My friend, are you going away already? But you have still something to tell me." —"Pardon me, M. le Curé, but I have nothing more to say to you. I only came here to present you my respects." The Curé d'Ars fixed his penetrating glance upon him. "Go there," said he, pointing to the confessional.

"But, Monsieur le Curé, I did not come to confess. I shall perhaps do so one day, but am not inclined to at this moment." And as M. Vianney continued to gaze at him in silence, he went on: "M. le Curé, I cannot. . . . I did not think of it. . . . I must really reflect." But still saying "I cannot" he fell on his knees.

M. Vianney made an appointment with him for the next day, so that he might finish his confession, but during the second interview the sinner rebelled against grace. Scarcely had he been a few

moments with his confessor, when his wife, who was praying in a corner of the church, saw him hastily leave the sacristy. "What is the matter?" said she. "Are you ill?" "No, but let us go away at once."

Madame N. was aghast. However, yielding to her entreaties, her husband agreed to defer his departure till the following morning, and also consented to be present at M. Vianney's mass. It was then that grace vanquished all resistance in this rebellious soul. Of his own free will he returned to the sacristy, and asked to continue his confession, which a few hours before he had decided to leave for ever unfinished.

His wife, who, full of anguish, had one day beheld him arrogantly quitting the church with no intention of ever returning, now had the happiness of seeing him, catechism in hand, spend hours in re-learning those truths which he had quite forgotten.

Sylvain Dutheil had long resisted grace, and yet his days were already numbered.

Born at Clermont l'Hérault he had, while quite young, joined the army. While there, he became consumptive, and returned to his family, with his health ruined and his soul in a still more dangerous state. One day, when passing through a street in Montpellier, he perceived a likeness of the Curé d'Ars in a shop window. He stopped, looked at it, and began to scoff. His sister, who accompanied him, told him he was wrong in so doing; if he had any confidence in this holy man, he might perhaps

be cured. Whereupon Sylvain continued joking all the more.

Still the thought of the Curé d'Ars never left him. During the night he saw his face continually in his dreams, and the next day he asked his sister to take him to this "*vieux curé*," as he called him.

The Curé d'Ars did not restore his bodily health, but he undertook to cure his soul. The process was long, for the young man would not think of confessing. However, his illness made terrible progress. M. Vianney saddened, but not discouraged, went to see him every day at the hotel Pertinant. At last he was reconciled to God. On the 5th of December 1855 the sick man, having received Holy Communion on the steps of the altar, was carried into the Sacristy. "How happy I am," he cried; "I have never been so happy in all my life." When taken back to the hotel, he said to his mother: "The joy of my Communion makes me forget all my sufferings—I do not wish to leave this holy man. I desire to die here." His wish was granted, for he died that night.

At the Catechising on the following day, the Curé d'Ars related the conversion and death of Sylvain Dutheil. This recital was extremely touching, and was heard by several witnesses; for it being Sunday, the church was full of people.

Later on the Curé d'Ars again spoke of this conversion, which made a great impression on him, either through the effort it had cost him—for from words which he let fall, one understood that this victory had been gained at the price of terrible

interior suffering—or else through the strange means which grace had employed. "God makes use of anything," he said, "even of my *carnaval*," for it was thus he called his portrait, that little picture which had been so instrumental in the conversion of this sinner.

Not every conversion was accomplished at Ars. Sometimes it was long after they had gone away that sinners at length responded to the Divine appeal, which had been addressed to them through the lips of M. Vianney; and he himself had gained his heavenly reward before the good seed, which he had sown, sprang up in certain souls.

In 1758 Louise Gimet, though only twenty, was already leading a bad life. When she came to Ars, as so many others did, to see the curé who worked miracles and had the gift of prophecy, he looked at her steadily and said: "Your hour has not yet come. Woe to you! You will do much evil, but the good God in His mercy will have pity on you; you will be converted, thanks to the devotion you have for His Divine Mother."

In fact, until then, Louise had still some devotion to the Blessed Virgin. An instance of this was quoted, which had been the general topic of conversation at Lyons. One day in a village street, a young man, having grossly insulted the Blessed Virgin, at once received a box on the ears from a young woman who was passing; this young woman was Louise Gimet.

At first the words of the curé did not have much effect. She continued in Lyons, and afterwards in

Paris, the scandalous life upon which she had entered, and falling into impiety she finished by conceiving a violent hatred to priests. When the Civil War broke out, she dressed like a man, took a sword, put on a *kêpi* with three rows of braid and a red belt, and under the name of Captain Pigerre, was given the command of a company. Tall, robust, and severe looking, having lived some years with a superior officer, she knew perfectly well how to play a soldier's part. However, she was anxiously waiting to try the correctness of her aim on the priests. She continually wandered with her men round the prisons, fearing that her prey would escape her; but at length her hatred was gratified. On the 24th of May, she was among those who fired on the Archbishop, and as he was still breathing after the third charge, she dealt him violent blows with the butt end of her gun. On the 26th of May she shot Père Olivaint. The latter, recognising a woman in the person of this captain, said to her calmly: "Madam, this costume does not become you." This fury afterwards owned that she had fired on thirteen priests. Being taken while fighting, she was condemned to death, but the Superioress of St Lazare obtained a reprieve which saved her life. While the prisoner, left to her own reflections in this little cell, recalled all the incidents of her past life, the words of the Curé d'Ars came back to her: "The good God in His mercy will have pity on you." And the virtue of these words that had fallen from the lips of a saint, began to act insensibly on this erring soul. But it is only just that the honour of her conversion

should be attributed, above all, to that one of her victims, whom she had treated so mercilessly. When the Superioress of St Lazare, who from the first had said to her, "I want your soul and I shall have it," saw that the sinner was beginning to repent, she lent her the *Sermons* of Pére Olivaint. Louise owned that the reading of this book had had the greatest part in her return to God. She had, before her final conversion, to sustain terrible struggles; but the transformation was complete, and for twenty years, by her sweetness, charity, and penitence, she expiated her past sins.

She died at Montpellier at the Solitude of Nazareth. On her death-bed she was asked if she did not fear the judgment of God. She answered: "I have thrown myself entirely into the arms of His mercy, what is there to fear?" The Curé d'Ars had not been the only, nor even the chief instrument of her salvation, but it was words of his which first began the work of grace in her.

For some other souls much nearer God, it was not even necessary to hear the saintly curé's voice; a visit to the scene of his apostolate converted them.

The Comte de St G. was growing old, but had no desire to approach the Sacraments. He was not an unbeliever; he even heard Mass on Sundays; but the moment that confession was mentioned, he frowned and turned the conversation. Even his wife, in spite of the ascendency which her virtue and affection gave her in all other matters, in vain laid siege to his obstinate soul.

One day, when almost hopeless, she begged him to accompany her on a pilgrimage she wished to make to the tomb of the Curé d'Ars. To please her he accepted.

He entered the little church, approached the confessional where so many persons had knelt, and at this remembrance he was seized with an inexplicable distress and alarm. He went up to the room of the holy curé. When he found himself in this narrow chamber, which had been the scene of such heroic mortifications; when he saw the poor furniture, and wretched bed, he suddenly understood what it was worth while to do to gain heaven, and his emotion was so great that everyone perceived it. The missionary who was there felt that the hour of grace had come, and suggested confession. The count bowed his head and assented. He was reconciled to God, and publicly manifested his naïve joy.

There was indeed cause for his happiness, for some months later, when living on his estate of St-Bonnet de Tussieux, he fell down struck by cerebral congestion. He immediately lost consciousness, and several priests who approached him could not make him hear. At last they called the missionary who had confessed him at Ars, who hastened to his bedside. At the sound of his voice, the dying man awoke and made quite a lucid confession, then fell asleep for ever. The Curé d'Ars had wished to assist him in his last hour by the ministry of one of his successors, after having converted him by the sight of those places which had witnessed his

sanctity. He was no longer in this world, but the marvellous virtue of his apostolic zeal was still effective. Like the great captain of the Middle Ages, this conqueror of souls gained victories after his death.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PILGRIMAGE: VOCATIONS, AND WORKS

THE Pontifical Decree, which proclaimed the virtue of our saint, declared he had "received special help and grace from God, to attract eager crowds of people to the confessional, day after day, and to bring back to a good life men lost in vice, adding, 'This was his work *par excellence*.'"

The conversion of sinners was, in fact, as we have just seen, the supreme work of the Curé d'Ars; but it was not his only one. He had acquired, through the confessional, too extensive a knowledge of the human heart, and had received from God too extraordinary a gift of intuition, for his enlightened judgment not to be made use of for other purposes.

So every day, public conveyances set down in the market place of Ars, to mingle with the eager throng of pilgrims, a crowd of persons, bishops, curés of parishes, heads of religious orders, fathers and mothers of families, young men and maidens, all come from afar to ask counsel of the Curé d'Ars.

He gave his advice very rapidly, never forgetting that his time belonged especially to sinners. Several women, who came to consult him, have related their

experiences. His answer was always given with great cordiality; but when they asked to confess, "Begin," was his reply. Then before they had finished their *confiteor*, he had closed down the grating on their side, and opened it on the other. If he did not refuse his counsel to devout souls, he did not think it worth while to hear their confession afterwards, since it could just as well be made to any other priest. The pilgrims, who found themselves thus brusquely dismissed, were quite taken aback, and some tried to protest. But the persons appointed to keep order in the church, who understood M. Vianney's ways of proceeding, explained to them that it would be useless to insist; then if they still continued to do so, they were taken gently by the arm, and quietly led away.

The answers of the Curé d'Ars were not all equally luminous. His lucidity depended upon the frame of mind of the questioner. If the confidence of the penitents in him, who was the instrument of grace, was limited, grace, in her turn, gave him but a limited measure of inspiration. When they failed in good faith towards him, seeking nothing but the satisfaction of self-love or curiosity, they obtained a vague, elusive, trite reply; it seemed as if his vision were obscured. But when they came to him with pure intentions and honest hearts, they were almost always munificently rewarded. He had but to speak a few words, and immediately the darkness surrounding a problem was dissipated. When they had been a moment in his presence, they felt themselves suddenly out of the labyrinth, in whose mazes

they had wandered so long. And when he had pronounced, "That is where God is calling you," those who had groped their way in thick darkness, saw their destiny shaping itself before them in radiant light.

He realised the words in Ecclesiastes to the full: "The just shall pour forth his wisdom like rain, he shall invoke the Lord in prayer, and the Lord shall direct his counsels."

He acknowledged this himself one day, when a curé of the Diocese of Autun submitted to him a very complicated case of restitution. The priest had reflected about it himself and consulted others, but as his uncertainty still continued, he went to Ars. There he obtained such a quick and decisive solution that he could not suppress his astonishment. "Monsieur le Curé," he asked, "wherever did you get your theology?" With a gesture which was a counsel rather than a reply, M. Vianney silently pointed to his *prie-Dieu*.

People consulted the Curé d'Ars on all sorts of subjects, sometimes about purely material interests. For instance, should they sell their land, take a partner, settle that matter or accept this situation. Not a day passed without his having some such question to decide. He, whose only diet was potatoes, charitably listened to men completely absorbed in their own creature comforts; and it sometimes happened that more than one of them left Ars with an answer that saved him from ruin.

But it was not for the possession of the goods of this world that men generally applied to the Curé

d'Ars. When they solicited his counsel, almost always the salvation or sanctity of a soul, a parish, or a community was at stake; to be precise, it was, oftenest of all, a question of deciding a vocation, or founding some good work. The reader would strangely deceive himself, if on reading this word "vocation," he should imagine that the Curé d'Ars indiscriminately urged young men to enter the seminary, or young girls the cloister. His counsels were admirably prudent. We have more than one proof of this in his preaching. This priest, who took only one meal a day all the year round, did not preach mortification beyond measure. No, he told labourers that it was their duty to nourish their bodies sufficiently, in order to fit them for their daily toil. Although he loved works of devotion, and energetically opposed those who wished to renounce them for works of charity, he nevertheless said plainly in the pulpit: "We must be prudent in all our actions, and seek, not our own desires, but that which is most pleasing to God. Let us suppose you have twenty *sous*, which you destine for having a Mass said; but you see a poor family in indigence, starving for bread; it is better to give your money to these unfortunate outcasts, because the Holy Sacrifice is always celebrated: the priest will not fail to say the Holy Mass, whereas these poor people may die of hunger. . . . You want to pray to God, to spend your day in His house; but you think it would be more useful to work for some poor people you know, who are in dreadful distress; such an action indeed would please God more

than if your entire day had been passed at the foot of the Tabernacle.[1]

In his direction he manifested the same good sense. With a marvellous intuitive discernment of character, he counselled marriage to one, a religious life to another; and, seeing their situation more clearly than they saw it themselves, he dissuaded many from pledging themselves to follow a mistaken vocation, which they had expected him to urge them to pursue.

The history of Mademoiselle A. C. . . . is significative. She felt herself drawn to the religious life by an irresistible attraction. After having cherished the desire for a long time in secret, she opened her heart to her parents, and asked for their permission to enter the Order of the Visitandines. Their answer was a positive refusal. Her father, a great master-builder in a town in the south, represented to her that he could not do without her assistance. Who would henceforth keep the books? Who would make the estimates, and draw up the plans? Mlle. C., who was remarkably intelligent, was in fact invaluable to him.

A gentleman, M. R. M. . . . made her a proposal of marriage, and her father and mother vainly pressed her to accept him. But she persistently refused; there was therefore a long conflict between her and them, which seemed as if it would never end, until one day she said to her father, "If you will let me go and see the Curé d'Ars, I promise to do what he counsels." Her father gave his consent,

[1] Esprit du Curé d'Ars, a Catechism on the Cardinal Virtues.

and she set out for Ars. It was in the year 1858.

Being received by M. Vianney with the greatest kindness, she explained to him as best she could how strong was the attraction she felt towards a religious life; and made known to him the promise she had given her father. The old man reflected an instant, then in a very decided tone said, "My child, you must marry."—"But, my father—" she began quite nonplussed. "Marry," continued M. Vianney without allowing her to finish, "and thus give peace to your family, and show the world the reality of your piety."

Mlle. C. A. C. had given her word to submit to the decision of the Curé d'Ars, and she kept it. She went to Fourvières to ask Our Lady to bless the life upon which she was about to enter, returned to her father's house, and married the young man whom he wished her to accept.

As M. Vianney persuaded many young girls, desirous of quitting the world, to remain in it, so did he in like manner retain at their parochial work many of the clergy, who believed themselves called to another apostolate.

A priest, whom he dissuaded from joining the Dominicans, has thus recounted to the Abbé Monnin the conversation that he had with him:—

"Monsieur le Curé, I wish, in going from here, to make a Retreat at the novitiate of Flavigny."

"Yes, my friend, you do well. Oh! if I could only follow you there!"

"Supposing God were to tell me to remain there and take the habit of St Dominic."

"No, my friend; that is an alien desire. Remain where you are."

"Do you not think Our Lord will require from me an account of a good desire, which may proceed from Him, and which I shall have stifled?"

"No," was the resolute answer of M. Vianney; "you are where God wills you to be. In remaining there, you will always find more good to be done than you will accomplish."

"Monsieur le Curé, give me your benediction in order that I may always know and do the will of Our Lord."

"May that benediction, my friend, both urge and restrain you!"

Subsequent events, more than once, revealed how rash people were in not following the prudent advice of M. Vianney.

An example of this may be found in an episode, related by the Reverend Father, Abbot of the Monastery of Aiguebelle to the present Curé d'Ars, in a letter, dated May 21st 1901, which abounds in details concerning his predecessor. I quote from the text:—

"Do not go to La Trappe," said M. Vianney to a young man, whose name we will not mention. "But, father, I am quite certain; my best inspirations lead me thither; I thirst for mortifications and austerities." "My child," replied M. Vianney, "do not go there."

"The young man went home, prayed and reflected once more, and persuading himself that he saw more clearly than the servant of God, went some time afterwards to Aiguebelle. He was accepted and

began his novitiate. All the observances of the Rule were easy to him, and he proved himself to be such a model of regularity, obedience and piety, that Dom Gabriel and the Reverend Père Bruno, who has since died at the Monastery of Dombes, had no hesitation in saying: "This time M. Vianney has been mistaken."

But shortly before his Profession, to the great surprise of all the Religious, he suddenly abandoned the monk's frock, and has never been heard of since. "Thus," concluded the Reverend Abbot of Aiguebelle, "the unerring insight of the venerable Curé d'Ars is again verified."

But, whilst retaining on the shore any who took their distaste for daily duties as the sign of a religious vocation, he boldly sent forth, as fishers of men, all those who had a veritable vocation. Some heard the first call of grace from his lips; others received from him increase of light and courage; others saw the obstacles that their families had raised to their vocations give way before him; and others, who had already taken the vows, but were passing through a crisis of discouragement, recovered, through his ardent exhortations, all the fervour of their first love.

The young Lasserre, a student of philosophy at the *petit Séminaire* of Rondeau (Grenoble), wished to become a missionary. "Go to the Capuchins," said M. Vianney, without the slightest hesitation. "Are you sure that it is the will of God?" objected the young man, to whom the Order had already been recommended, but who was prejudiced against it.

"Yes, I assure you it is." Lasserre therefore entered the novitiate of the Minor Friars, and was sent to the Mission at Aden, where he afterwards became a bishop.

Nicolas Monnet of Lyons had thoughts of *la Trappe;* but the austerities of the Rule alarmed him. "Have not those in *la Trappe* flesh and bones like you?" asked M. Vianney; and he soon inspired the young man with such courage that all his apprehensions vanished, and he entered la Trappe at Aiguebelle, under the name of Brother Hildebrand.

Clemence Joly, who had become Sister Alexine, was appointed an Auxiliary at the School at Misérieux. But she fell into despondency, had doubts about her vocation, and thought of quitting the cloister. One day, when she was praying at the far end of the church, M. Vianney went straight up to her, and inspired her with strength and consolation for the rest of her life.

Young E. G. . . ., in the department of the Ardèche, wished to be a Jesuit; but his father not being able to reconcile himself to the idea, he made up his mind to prove to him that, if he thought of leaving the world, it was not because of his incapacity to shine in it: he therefore presented himself at St Cyr, and was accepted. Then, as he talked of leaving, his father suddenly asked him one day, "Will you abide by the decision of the Curé d'Ars?"

"Willingly."

"Then shall I go with you to him?"

"Whenever you wish." It was at the end of September 1856 that the father and son went to Ars. They were present at the catechising. M. Vianney began by speaking about the duties of servants to their masters. But soon, without any transition, he abandoned his subject and related the vocations of St Bernard, St Louis de Gonzague, and Mme. Louise de France.

"It is not necessary to go and see him," said M. G. . . . as they went out. "I know quite well what he will tell me." They went however, the son to receive encouragement, and the father such consolation as enabled him generously to accept the vocation that caused him such grief.

Felix Brise of Coublanc (Saône et Loire) went to Ars on September 8th 1854, to celebrate the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. Whilst M. Vianney made his way through the dense, thronging crowd, which beset his path, he noticed the young man, and went directly towards him. Felix at once avowed he thought he had a call to *la Trappe*. "Yes, my child," replied the holy curé, "yes, go, and God wil bless you." But on reaching home, the pilgrim felt his courage vanishing away. He waited a year and then returned to Ars. After that he waited another year; and thinking it would not matter which Order he entered so long as he became a Religious, he joined that of the Petits Frères de Marie, at the end of 1856. But he found no happiness there: he remained six years, dissatisfied and troubled, being unwilling to understand that one can only be happy in following one's vocation. He acknowledged this,

when he at last submitted to the Rule, whose austerities had seemed so alarming, though they were really, as M. Vianney had seen, exactly suited to him. In 1863 he entered *la Trappe* des Dombes, and became its first postulant. Out of gratitude to the Curé d'Ars, who had urged him to follow his true vocation, and also because the Founders of the new monastery had confided their House to his prayers, he took the name of Frère Philomena.

If these histories did not lose nearly all their interest by being thus reduced to a dry epitome, for want of space to develop them, we would add other names to this short list. But, even if we made it a long one, it would after all give but an inadequate idea of the number of persons, who were either awakened to their vocation, or confirmed in it, through the instrumentality of the Curé d'Ars. I do not think one can mention a single *grand Séminaire* or Institute in France, to which he did not send recruits. Few Founders of Orders have provided the Church with so many ministers and servants as this *petit curé de campagne.*

And what great works he gave to it! How many charitable projects were conceived by his personal inspiration! And how many, that had their origin elsewhere, received through his counsel and encouragement the stimulus that made them productive of good. A word from him was all-powerful in smoothing difficulties and multiplying resources. At his call infant schools were opened and convents sprang, as it were, from the ground. He covered the Lyonese District with Orphanages. He was

even consulted on literary and artistic subjects. For talent came now and then, as charity did every day, to submit its conceptions to him. Ernest Hello, a celebrated writer, consulted him on his first works in defence of the Faith. And long before the people of the Lyonnais vowed, in the hour of national peril, to provide for their guardian saint a House more worthy of her than the insignificant chapel that bore her name, the architect Bossan showed to the Curé d'Ars his plans for the beautiful church, with which it was his dream to crown the ancient hill of Fourvières. He was promised that this dream would be realised; and his designs obtained enthusiastic approval.[1]

The works founded with the co-operation of the Curé d'Ars had the same stability as the vocations he blessed, having been like them submitted to the test of his sound common sense. In fact, in the innumerable projects presented for his judgment, he saw both the good and the evil with lightning-like rapidity. Rejecting all that was futile or rash, amending unskilful blunders, and postponing that which needed time for ripening, he gave his entire approval to all Foundations conceived by enlightened zeal, warning their Founders of the disappointments inseparable from every beginning, and making them hope against hope.

The story of one of these works must be related here since it owed its birth to the Curé d'Ars. It is

[1] In the new basilica of Fourvières a picture of the Curé d'Ars is most appropriately painted—on the window dedicated to Confessors.

one of the most popular bequeathed to us by the last century: the Society of the *Dames Auxiliatrices du Purgatoire*, nurses of the poor.

Eugénie Smet, born March 25th 1825, lived with her family at Loos, near Lille. From childhood she had shown profound pity for the souls in Purgatory, and filial confidence in God.

On All Souls' Day, November 2nd 1853, after making her Communion, she was suddenly struck with this thought: there are Communities for every need of the Church Militant, but there is not a single one entirely devoted to the Church Suffering, by means of works of zeal and charity. And immediately it seemed to her that she was called to supply this need.

But her project did not meet with much encouragement at first. The Curé of Loos, who had all her confidence, made a formal objection to it. According to him, the success of the works to which she devoted herself in the world proved that God did not demand anything else of her. Mgr. Challandon, Bishop of Belley, whom she had known during a Retreat, made at the Sacré-Cœur at Lille, was of the same opinion. "Your idea of an Order, that shall have the redemption of souls (even as the Order of Mercy has the redemption of captives) as its sole object and end, has something new in it, very pleasing to piety. The realisation of this project would be a great undertaking, unless God were to pour floods of His light into your soul. I believe M. le Curé de Loos has done quite right to dissuade you from being the Foundress of this new Order,

until there is no more good to be done in your immediate neighbourhood."

The supernatural light invoked by the Bishop of Belley was not poured forth on Mlle. Smet until after two years of expectant hope; but it was poured "in floods" as he had demanded it should be. The light reached Loos from a little parish he had reason to know, since it had become the most famous in his diocese.

In July 1855 Mlle. Smet had a sudden inspiration to have recourse to the Curé d'Ars, whose fame had reached her a few weeks before. She was just wondering how she should enter into communication with him, when one of her friends, Mlle. Henriette W. . . . came and announced that she was setting out with her father on a pilgrimage to Ars. Thereupon Mlle. Smet revealed her project, and begged her friend to solicit the Curé d'Ars for an exact reply to the question: Ought she to undertake the foundation of a Community consecrated to the Souls in Purgatory, in spite of the difficulties, which seemed to oppose it? The reply soon arrived. It was brief, but decidedly favourable. M. Vianney had said: "When she wishes she will establish an Order for the Souls in Purgatory." Mlle. Smet communicated this reply to Mgr. Chalandon. "My child," he replied, "M. le Curé d'Ars is a saint, in whose prayers I have perfect confidence. . . . If you desire to obtain more light from him, you can write to M. Toccanier, *vicaire* of Ars, in my name and ask him to reply to you."

At the end of October Mlle. Smet entreated M.

Vianney, through the medium of M. Toccanier, to meditate upon her project on All Souls' Day. On the 11th of November the latter replied, "I submitted your request to my holy curé. . . . You can rest assured of two things: he approves of your vocation to the Religious Life, and the foundation of this new Order, which, according to him, will have a rapid development."

Mlle. Smet had no more doubts: she felt quite possessed by the joy of certainty found after long search. But soon the fear of the unknown, and the thought of leaving her mother, tortured her. She again appealed to the Curé d'Ars, and received the following reply from M. Toccanier: "I ventured to point out to him the difficulties you experience in a separation, painful enough to your own heart, but infinitely more so to your family. To my great astonishment he, who usually counsels young persons not to act in opposition to their parents, but to wait patiently for their consent, did not hesitate an instant with regard to you. He says, 'The tears, that natural tenderness will cause to flow, will be dried ere long!' and he encourages you to put your resolve into execution, saying to God: 'Behold Thy servant, do with me as Thou wilt. . . .' He prays for you. I will unite with him to ask that, in this terrible struggle between nature and the grace existing in your heart, grace may be always victor."

Before this letter reached Loos, Mme. Smet had given her consent, and the good news was at once communicated to the Curé d'Ars. "God acts

vigorously and gently: it is good to rely on Him," was his answer.

On Jan. 19th 1856, Mlle. Smet was in Paris; and on the 22nd Mgr. Sibour approved of the new Order. But innumerable trials beset the path of the Foundress; money was lacking, recruits did not rally round her; and, to crown all, she was attacked by an excruciatingly painful malady. It was to Ars that she appealed for sympathy; and from Ars she received the energetic cordial reserved for valiant souls. "M. le Curé says," wrote the Abbé Toccanier, "that your crosses are blossoms, which will soon bring forth fruit." And in another letter "M. le Curé says, 'God wills you to endure these sufferings that, through them, you may obtain abundant grace, both for yourself and your work.'" At the same time the Curé d'Ars sent the following counsel, in which his habitual prudence may be recognised: "Concerning the Novitiate, few to begin with, but those few of the first quality, of the best grain."

On July 1st Mlle. Smet left the temporary abode, which had sheltered her little Society till then, and removed to a house in the rue de la Barouillère, which became the cradle of the new Order. It was decided that the Sisters should consecrate themselves to works of charity; but they were in doubt as to which they ought to choose. Two days after their instalment, an unknown person came and asked the new-comers if one of them would go and visit a poor, sick man in that district. The Foundress, who had taken the name of Mère Marie de la

Providence, saw in this incident an answer from God to the question she was asking herself; and decided that the Helpers of the Holy Souls should also be nurses of the sick. The Curé d'Ars, on being consulted, approved with all his heart, saying: "It is God who has inspired you to work for the deliverance of Souls in Purgatory by the practice of Works of Mercy, as a means to that end. You will thus realise the Spirit of our Saviour in all its plenitude, by solacing His suffering members upon earth, and those in Purgatory, at one and the same time."

The work of the visitation of the sick was rapidly extended, and soon transformed the Helpers into so many Apostles; for, almost everywhere they penetrated, faith and morality followed in their train. Whilst healing the wounds of the body, they quickly detected those of the soul, and caused parents to marry, children to be baptised, adults to make their first Communion, and the dying to confess. In this poor neighbourhood, where the people would have repulsed any other kind of preaching, the living sermon of the devoted lives in their midst was not to be resisted.

Trials, however, were by no means spared them; though consolation always came to them from Ars. In January 1857, after the tragic death of Mgr. Sibour, which deprived them of a loved protector, and rendered their future uncertain, they received this encouragement. "Since you are the children of Providence, it is necessary that this should be apparent to all eyes. A House, which is founded

on the Cross, does not fear the storm: its foundation is divine. It is essential that souls in Purgatory should be able to say of their Helpers: "We have advocates upon earth, who not only know how to pray, but how to sympathise, because they know what it is to suffer."

On New Year's day, 1859, the Abbé Toccanier visited the little Community. When he returned to Ars, he wrote to Mère Marie de la Providence: "I have spoken to the good father at Ars of his spiritual family in Paris. I spoke at great length, and in detail. . . . Ah! how many tears of sacred emotion he shed, whilst listening to my recital of the touching facts you related. His admiration for the wonderful dealings of Providence with your Society is unbounded. . . . And when I said to him: 'M. le Curé, it is possible that the mother of that little family may come to see you,' he replied: 'Oh! so much the better! I should like a visit from her much more than a visit from a queen. It does one good to see beautiful souls. And her work is so evidently the work of God.'"

The promised visit was never made; for on August 4th of that same year, the Curé d'Ars was taken away from the spiritual daughters, who loved him so well.

We have not space to continue the history of that family which he had adopted; suffice it to say, it prospered, as he had promised it would. The pliancy of its Rule allowing it to graft one charitable work on another, and to answer to the most diverse needs. It has founded several houses in

Paris, and established itself in many towns in France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, England, and in North and South America. Mère Marie de la Providence, who only survived the Curé d'Ars eleven years, had time to send a colony to Nantes, another to Brussels, and a third to China to the Kiang-Nan Mission.

The memory of her spiritual Father sustained her even to the end, through all the tortures of her dreadful agony. The incurable complaint from which she suffered at last compelled her to remain in bed. This was in August 1870, and from that time she felt life ebbing slowly, with the blood which issued from an open wound. Her Director, Père Olivaint, continued the instructions on the good uses of suffering given her by the Curé d'Ars, and stimulated her as the latter had so often done, during the last three years of his life, to bear her heavy cross. It even seemed as if the virile spirit, and the quaint familiar language of the Blessed Jean Vianney inspired him, when he cheered her with words like these, "Come, come! I will not allow any one to die frowning."

On January 9th, the end seeming near, Mère Marie de la Providence received the last Sacraments. Père Olivaint administered them, clothed in a surplice—the gift of the Abbé Toccanier—which had belonged to the Curé d'Ars. At times, the whizzing of the shells which, since the evening before, had been falling in Paris, drowned the voice of the priest, and spoke still more forcibly of death.

The agony was prolonged for a month, during which neither her sufferings nor her fortitude was

diminished. And the ceaseless roaring of the cannon, whilst warning the Helper of those in Purgatory, that a great number of souls were passing into eternity, eloquently preached of the necessity to offer up her torture for their redemption. In the end her lips could no longer breathe forth prayers. As her sensibility to suffering remained the same, she took the rosary of the Curé d'Ars, which she called her chloroform, and on each bead repeated : "*Fiat Jesus.*"

On February 7th, the fête in commemoration of Christ's agony in the garden, she passed away. And thus ended this beautiful life which would have been less full of charitable works if the Curé d'Ars had not directed it at a critical moment. Her biography has already been written; and perhaps will one day be included in this series. Perhaps also the Annals of the Saints will hereafter have the names of Jean-Marie Vianney and Eugénie Smet associated together, as they have those of Saint François de Sales and Sainte Jeanne de Chantal, and those of Saint François d'Assise and Sainte Claire.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PILGRIMAGE. THE SIGNS OF THE SAINT'S MISSION

WE see in the Gospel how often Jesus treats the cure of the body as an image of the healing of the soul. Therefore, it is by no means surprising that those saints who were specially raised up to convert sinners to the life of grace, should generally receive as sign of their mission the power of restoring the sick to health. As regards this extraordinary gift, the Curé d'Ars was no exception.

We will not let all the unfortunates whom he cured pass before our reader's eyes; this procession would but resemble that which one sees in the life of any thaumaturgus. Besides, we should be asked for proofs, and it is impossible in such a brief volume as ours to quote or discuss all the various testimonies. Suffice it to say that many such persons have gone to Ars, and, on returning home, relieved if not cured, have obtained certificates more or less similar to that given by Dr Ollier, the celebrated surgeon, to Mademoiselle M. . . . on January 9th 1857: "I was beginning to despair of her recovery, and thought she had an incurable chest affection, when, after one journey, I saw Mlle. M. perfectly cured. I own that I cannot find any natural explanation of this cure."

But it was the holy man's perfect humility which was the most interesting point in the cures which took place at Ars.

He always referred the sick to St Philomena, telling them to make a Novena in her honour, and though he might pray with and bless them, sometimes even laying his hands on them, yet he always gave the honour of their recovery to the little saint. It was to her alone, after God, they owed any gratitude. He would not allow them to recognise any miraculous power in him; and fearing lest, in spite of all he could say, public opinion would attribute it to him, he was scrupulously silent on the graces obtained through his prayers.

If sometimes he did own that surprising cures had taken place under his eyes, it was only when he perceived that God's sovereign power was being called in question. One day, in July 1842, one of his colleagues was telling him of the discussion provoked by the case of some sick person: "My friend," he replied, "let people of the world talk as they like. Alas! how should they see; they are blind. If to-day our Lord were to perform all the miracles which He did in Judea, they would not believe in them. He, to Whom all power has been given has not yet lost it. For instance, last week a poor vine-dresser from the other side of the water[1] brought his little boy of twelve across on his shoulders. The child was lame with both legs, and had never walked. This good man made a Novena to St Philomena, and his little boy was

[1] That is to say from the opposite bank of the Sâone.

cured on the ninth day, and went off running and jumping before him.[1] As of old, when our Lord healed the lame, cured the sick, and raised the dead, there were people standing by who saw the marvels, but who yet did not believe. My friend, men are always and everywhere the same."

Thus it was that in order to defend the rights of God the holy man would at times spontaneously relate what extraordinary things used to take place at Ars. But, when this Almighty Power was not called in question, he strove to maintain the most complete silence on the favours which the pilgrims received through him, and was even annoyed at any expression of gratitude.

Towards the close of his life he was so much embarrassed by the chorus of thanksgiving evoked by the efficacity of his prayers, that he implored St Philomena to spare him this torture. His request was granted and the cures became rare at Ars. At first, people were astonished, but when it became known that the sick had been healed after their return to their own homes, they then understood that the holy Curé had implored heaven to spare his humility. The Abbé Toccanier, desiring to be satisfied on this point, one day said to him:

[1] Among the sick cured by the intercession of the Curé d'Ars both in his life-time and after his death, we may enumerate many children. Two of these cures were examined by the Congregation of Rites during the process of Beatification, and one of these, a little girl, was received into an orphanage. It seems as if the power of restoring life to sick children was granted to the Curé d'Ars in reward for all he had done for so many neglected little ones.

"Monsieur le Curé, do you know what report is spread about you? They say that you have forbidden St Philomena to work any more miracles." "That is true, my dear friend," he naïvely answered, "all that caused too much talk and brought too many people here. I told her to convert their souls, but to heal their bodies after they had gone away. She has obeyed me; many persons have begun their Novenas here and have been cured at home, unseen, unknown."

For the one ambition of the good curé was to heal souls. In his eyes, the cure of the body was of much less importance, and was but a sign and an accessory of his mission. We leave it, then, to other biographers to speak at greater length of the cures obtained at Ars. To dwell on them longer, would be to give an idea that the Blessed Curé d'Ars, like many other saints, was raised up to relieve bodily ills, and this would give a very incorrect impression of his rôle.

Almost as numerous as the sick and infirm were the crowds of persons sorely wounded in the battle of life who repaired to Ars to be healed. Having heard that M. Vianney possessed a marvellous gift of consolation, they confided to him all their sad secrets. They told him of their reverses of fortune, their family troubles, their blighted hopes, their vanished illusions, and they wept before him over their wasted lives. At the first words of their recital they saw him clasp his hands and raise supplicating glances to heaven, then he would turn on them a look so full of sympathy that hope revived,

After this they would hear tender yet firm counsel, always wonderfully appropriate to their needs. In some cases, they learnt to recognise the true cause of their misfortunes in the faults of their character, and having discovered the root of the evil, they understood the remedy. They were exhorted to seek for consolation in faith, and after kneeling before him, they went away comforted and strengthened.

He did not listen coldly to any tale of distress, but showed especial compassion for two classes of sufferers. First, for those whose lives had been entirely changed through the death of their nearest relatives; such as orphans left quite unprovided for, or mothers who, having lost their children, had no longer any desire to live. And secondly, for those who, good Christians themselves, had yet the grief of seeing a friend or relative die suddenly without confession, in circumstances which appeared to make salvation doubtful.

To the former, he would suggest fresh reasons for bearing life's burden. To the latter, he would gently explain, as if he himself had never feared God's judgments, the infinite abyss of Divine pity.

Sometimes, too, after having prayed, he gave them quite precise answers, which proved that in some mysterious way, he had been warned as to the fate of their lost ones: "Your husband or your friend," he would say, "is saved; but let us pray earnestly for his deliverance."

Besides receiving special light concerning spiritual things, he had also intuitions regarding the future, and one may say that if, during his life-time, his en-

counters with the demon made such a stir, so, after his death, nothing was more discussed than his predictions. More than one prophecy has been falsely attributed to him. Even to-day, no event of any importance takes place in the Church, without someone finding some hint of it in certain words of his, not understanding that one thereby compromises his memory, in thus lightly retailing remarks whose origin is most doubtful.

His predictions usually referred to private individuals, rather than to public events. He announced to several their approaching end, and it was almost always to newly-converted sinners, who needed to be kept from backsliding by the thought of imminent death, or else to devout souls, whose fervour was redoubled by the expectation of their heavenly joy. He warned others that one of their relatives, a father, mother or sister would soon be taken from them. He advised some to defer entering religion till a certain date fixed by himself, when the obstacles which had hindered their vocation were removed. Again, he foresaw the creation of such an Order or the dispersion of such a Community; thus he prevented a young girl from entering a convent which, according to him, would be shut in a year, and in fact this convent was closed on account of the troubles in 1848. Therefore, it was especially when it was a question of the salvation of a soul, or of giving it a surer direction, that the veil of the future was more or less lifted for the Curé d'Ars. The greater part of his predictions related expressly to his providential mission—that is, to

the conversion of sinners, and the guidance of souls.

When it is known that he could see into the future, one is not astonished that he also saw material objects, very distant from him, but connected with persons, then in his presence. This faculty of second-sight is in fact much less extraordinary than the gift of prophecy. No one can fail to recognise that it is often met with in the lives of those in whom one would never expect to find anything supernatural.

In the saints it is a sign of sanctity, not so much in itself, as on account of the manner in which it is closely allied to their virtues and mission.

That which interests us as regards our hero, is not simply that he had the gift of clairvoyance, but that he never exercised it except when it was a question of rendering some service, or warning a sinner of his faults. To give some instances of the first case: a comrade of Antoine Saubin's, whose conversion we have previously related, came to Ars by the advice of his friend. M. Vianney perceiving him in the crowd, said to him, "Go back quickly to Lyons, your house is on fire." This was true. The next year, the pilgrim returned to Ars and was converted. On another occasion, M. Vianney, after hearing a country-woman's confession, sent her away at once, saying there was a serpent in her house. She went home, looked in vain in every corner of the house, and at last thought of shaking the mattress that had been put out in the sun to dry. She then saw a large snake, which, had it not been for M.

Vianney's warning, would perhaps have bitten her in her sleep.

Another day, the Curé d'Ars perceiving in the church porch, a young girl who had commenced a retreat, warned her to go home, where they were expecting her, without delay. She at once set out, and found that just before M. Vianney had spoken to her, a sister, whom she had left in perfect health, had died.

To give another instance; a woman who was just going to confession at Ars consulted a sorcerer, for some malady or other, on the way. The man gave her a bottle containing pretended charms, which she hid in a bush before entering the village. When M. Vianney had heard her confession, he said to her, "You have told me nothing about the bottle you left under the hedge." He then explained to her that the Catholic religion condemned all such superstitions, and made her promise never again to consult any sorcerer. In this case it was apostolic zeal which gave the curé insight; in others it was charity, and it is above all remarkable that this gift of clairvoyance was only used by him for good, and for that special form of good, which it was his destiny to achieve.

An intuitive perception of the thoughts of others amounting to insight was much more frequently exercised in the apostolate of the Curé d'Ars, than clairvoyance. Nay, it was so habitual to him, so intimately and inseparably associated with his mission, that I could not enter into details about it here, without having to re-write the preceding

chapters, especially that one on the conversions. So, at the risk of repeating myself, I will say that almost every day, in passing before the persons grouped round his confessional, the Curé d'Ars divined those who most urgently needed his ministrations, either because they had not time to wait, or because they were particularly unhappy, and made a sign to them to enter first, nobody being astonished at this preference. He likewise detected those who were unwilling to confess, went into the church, took them by the hand, and led them to the Sacristy. More than one penitent, after having finished his confession, heard the confessor say to him, "Why did you not confess such and such a fault?"

It is related that several persons tried to put this penetration to the proof, and were confounded. One young man who feigned deep repentance was, the very moment he knelt down, dismissed by the Curé d'Ars with the curt remark, "My friend, I have not time to hear you." The next day, ashamed of having been found out, and this time really contrite, the young man again presented himself, and was received with an affectionate embrace. Another penitent having made a false confession, the curé, who had listened to him without a word or remark, said as he ended, "You are indeed a great sinner: but the sin you have committed is not what you have just told me; it is so and so." The impostor, overwhelmed by this revelation of his sin, was converted.

Pure souls as well as sinners, and souls in anxiety about their destiny were recognized in like manner.

Many persons who came to consult M. Vianney had scarcely begun their explanations, when he interrupted them saying: "I see what you want," and forthwith gave his advice, implying a complete understanding of the situation. Others received the answers they desired, even before they had put their questions. Whilst traversing the crowded market-place after he had left the church, he sometimes went straight to one person, and began spontaneously to converse with him, on the very subject which had brought him to Ars.

Many perfectly authentic instances of this intuition are well known; and others are continually cited. But if there were perhaps some cases, in which the Curé d'Ars might have been enlightened as to the sentiments of his penitents by their attitude and physiognomy, or others in which his extensive knowledge of the human heart led him to divine what remained to be told, from what they had already said, the immense majority of cases cannot be considered otherwise than as phenomena of insight. I do not deny that phenomena having a resemblance to these, are met with in persons who are not saints, but I must at once add with the author of the *Psychology of the Saints*,[1] that in saints, clairvoyance always answers some useful purpose, "that it cannot be disassociated from the sanctity which precedes and follows it, and which gives it all its significance"; that there is "a connection between this marvellous gift and the entire life of its possessor, his intimate friendships, his Mission in the Church,

[1] H. Joly, *The Psychology of the Saints*, p. 80.

and the cares of his Apostolate"; and that finally, "the extraordinary phenomena recorded count as a manifestation and result of sanctity." And the example of the Curé d'Ars is a special proof of this. Indeed one does not find a single case, in which his penetration was applied to ordinary or even to singular events. It never had any other object than the sanctification of souls; it was never called forth except by zeal and charity. This is the essential point, for it shows that the Curé d'Ars was a man entirely penetrated by the Divine Spirit.

* * *

No one could have a correct idea of the immense influence exercised by the Curé d'Ars, without knowing that it was extended to a great number of persons, who never made a pilgrimage to Ars. He cured, consoled, counselled, and converted from a distance those who, being unable to come so far, either wrote to him themselves, or deputed others to explain their case to him. We saw in the preceding chapter, that he helped to found the Society of the *Dames Auxiliatrices du Purgatoire* (or Helpers of the Holy Souls) without having had a visit from the Foundress; but that he directed her, first through the medium of one of her friends, and afterwards by correspondence.

Every day, when he took his mid-day meal, he found a heap of letters on his table. They came from all quarters and were written in every imaginable style. As he had not time to read all, he burnt those which began with compliments, without even glancing at them, and rapidly ran through the others.

After his death, a considerable number were found in his room, very few, however, when compared with those he had received.

Some of the writers asked to be enlightened about their vocation, character or faults, others entered into particulars concerning their capacities or their past history; others again limited themselves to cursory information, trusting to the marvellous penetration of their Director. If comparatively few letters of this kind have been found, it is because the Curé d'Ars destroyed confidential ones as soon as he had read them.

Many told of illnesses, infirmities, family griefs, and heart-rending misfortunes, and asked for cure or consolation. Many also solicited prayers for the conversion of a soul, or a family. Some of these are very touching, such as the one in which Lord Howard, through a friend, asked the Curé d'Ars to pray for the conversion of his father, the Duke of Norfolk. In other letters, bishops and priests begged him to obtain from God the regeneration of their diocese or parish; and charitable works of all kinds were recommended to him,

He scarcely ever replied himself, since he had not a moment to spare; but answered, when he deemed it necessary, through his collaborators. Letters which asked for prayers rather than advice, were almost always unanswered. But they were by no means without effect, and were often followed by others in which the writers expressed, with more or less exuberance, their gratitude for favours obtained. They said that, from the day on which

they had asked the Curé d'Ars to pray for them, the illness of the invalid had abated, the eyes of the sinner had begun to be opened, or the success of the work had been decided. When one thinks of the thanksgivings, that so many different correspondents charged him to offer to God in their names, for answering the petitions proffered through him, it is not difficult to understand why the renown of M. Vianney had penetrated to regions so remote from Ars, nor why the little village had become one of the principal centres from which Christian life in France received light and vigour during the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER X

### THE INNER LIFE OF THE BLESSED CURÉ D'ARS AT THE TIME OF THE PILGRIMAGE

IT is natural to wonder on reading the description of M. Vianney's days, so full of pressing duties, how he contrived to commune with his own heart in the tumult of a crowded throng, and think a little of himself, whilst never ceasing to be occupied with others. But where there is a will there is a way. It was when the Curé d'Ars had no longer, as it seemed, a moment's leisure, that he cultivated his soul the most carefully. It was then that, his virtues having freely and vigorously expanded, he became a wonderful model of charity, urbanity, self-sacrifice, humility, and piety; and his interior life was never more intense, than when the exterior one was overcharged with absorbing work.

He no longer had anything he could call his own, not even the straw of his bed; for he had sold his furniture and all he possessed, to persons who allowed him the use of it during his life. But the more he despoiled himself, the more he had to give away; money flowed into his hands from all sides, charitable persons knowing it would be immediately employed for useful Foundations. Visitors gave it him, letters contained it, and he often found

large sums in his drawers without having the least idea how they came there. Whenever a fresh emergency arose he at once betook himself to prayer, "quite wearying his good consuls" as he called his saints; and soon resources adequate to his need arrived.

He relieved all the poor around him, bought them bread, and paid their rent. In the autumn of 1864, having sent to claim a small sum that was owing to him, the debtor refused to pay, alleging in excuse that the Curé d'Ars had no need of money. "No need of money!" he said when this was repeated to him. "And yet we are nearing Martinmas, and I have more than thirty rents to pay." About the same time, when he was told that the death of one of his parishioners would insure him an income, he remarked, "Oh! that income is revertible to several lives."

His liberality spread much beyond the bounds of his parish and diocese; it was prodigious. The Missions he founded in the Diocese of Belley, represented in themselves alone a capital of 200,000 francs: not to mention the sums he almost everywhere granted to charitable works. But he by no means claimed to make Ars the central depot of charity in France. He therefore did not accept all the money that was offered to him, saying to certain persons, "I do not want so much; can you not divide the sum and give me only a part of it?" and to others, "My child, keep your money: the place that you were born in needs it; give it there." In him, as in Saint Vincent de Paul, that other son of the soil, good common sense, the fundamental

quality of the French peasant, was always to be found, and this good sense enlightened by faith, preserved him from all excess.

He lavished kind attentions and gracious tokens of respect and affection on all who approached him, becoming more and more affable the more he advanced in years. But his patience was subjected to the severest tests! He never left the church, nay, never even crossed it, without being molested by importunate persons who, in their efforts to monopolize his attention, would bar his way and beset him with absurd requests, repeated *ad infinitum*. Often idle questions were put to him from all sides at once; and sometimes in their eagerness the questioners would catch hold of the sleeves of his surplice, so that he felt himself being pulled in opposite directions at the same moment. But this and similar inconsiderate treatment, never made him frown or look displeased, or utter a hasty word. He was good, always good to everyone, so good that the surname *le bon* was given to him during his life and even to-day in Ars, in France, and in Rome he is still currently spoken of as *le bon Curé d'Ars*. Everyone called him "Father," because that word came naturally to the lips of all who saw his smiling face, his halo of long white silvery locks, and his brilliant eyes which pierced the depths of every heart, though they inspired no fear.

He was particularly kind to his fellow-priests, whom he spared from all contrariety, doing their work himself whenever he thought they were not quite well. "One of the first Sundays I had the

happiness of spending with him," said M. Toccanier, "the good saint noticed during Vespers that I coughed very much. In the evening, after night prayers, what was my astonishment to see my venerable curé, lantern in hand, braving the night and the inclement weather to come to me and say with kind solicitude, 'My friend, I have noticed that you cough very much; I am not at all tired. If you would like it, I would say the first Mass in your place and undertake the catechizing of the children.'"

All his Missioners were objects of his solicitude. He burdened himself to save their strength, watched over their well-being, and taxed his ingenuity to afford them pleasure. He gave them everything he had, even the pious treasures he received as presents, such as crosses, medals, rosaries, and reliquaries, which were the only objects he cherished.

Every day, after their mid-day meal, he paid a short visit to them, annoyed that they should rise as he entered. "Sit down, sit down," he always said to them; and they were obliged to sit down, whilst he remained standing before them. In the evening he received them in his room with a few intimate friends, amongst whom pilgrims were sometimes to be found. It was the moment in which he abandoned himself to unconstrained enjoyment. Standing before his table, or in winter before his hearth, he conversed with great animation, not at all as if he had been engaged in the confessional the whole day long. He was never gloomy, but was, on the contrary, quite gay, in spite of his internal

sufferings, expressing himself with a certain quaint, humorous simplicity. For instance, when someone asked him, if it would be to his Missioners that he would leave his prophet's mantle, the idea suddenly suggesting itself to him that not only had he never possessed a mantle in his life but that, even the very underlinen upon his person was not his own, he began to laugh and said: "My friend, you must not look for a mantle where there is not even a shirt."[1]

If he saw that they wished to question him so as to elicit the secrets of his inner life, he kept on talking as long as he possibly could. He was quite silent, on the contrary, when they mentioned profane things. But this occurred rarely; and as, out of deference, the lead in the conversation was almost always left to him, it ran no risk of wandering from his most familiar themes, God and salvation, the vanity of the pleasures of this world, and the eternal joys of the next.

It was a kind of second catechizing, a catechizing as edifying as the one in the morning; but freer in its scope, and far richer in picturesque imagery and anecdote.

He had the gift of story-telling, and related a hundred different anecdotes about the lives of the Saints, with a freshness of imagination that age never dimmed; and his store was especially inexhaustible when he wished to prove that holiness

[1] He suddenly indulged in the same gentle gaiety on another occasion, when a nun naïvely said to him, "My Father, they say that you are unlearned." "My child,' he replied, "they have not deceived you; but, no matter! in spite of that I will tell you much more than you will ever do."

renders a man master, so to speak, of the will of God. His hearers listened to him with emotion; and a strong secret conviction that the annals of sanctity would one day record many facts of the same kind about him.

The conversation though not very long, was always of an intimate character. The visitors soon rose to leave so as to give him a little time for repose. However fatigued he might be, he always accompanied them to the head of the stairs, and courteously "presented his respects to them" in the good old fashion. Indulgent to others, he continued to be severe towards himself, treating his body, which he called his "corpse," with great austerity. During the last three years of his life, he took a little more nourishment, but not much, for he never ate meat two days in succession, and often passed weeks without tasting it. Also he consented to have a little fire made in his room. But if, in deference to the commands of his superiors, he slightly mitigated the severity of his regimen, it was not because his spirit of mortification had diminished in fervour,[1] but because he had learnt that it was his greatest penance to accept those sufferings that age and his office imposed.

[1] During the last ten years of his life he took a bit of bread and a cup of milk after his Mass. Brother Jerome, who was often present at this light repast, soon noticed that he always ate the bread first, and drank the milk afterwards. "But, *Monsieur le Curé*," he observed one day when he saw with what difficulty the bread was swallowed, "if you were to put your bread in the milk it would be much better." "Yes, I know" was his gentle answer.

"Grant me the conversion of my parish," he had said to the Almighty, at the beginning of his Apostolate, "and I consent to suffer whatsoever Thou wilt, during the whole of my life." His prayer was answered. He was continually tortured by the most dreadful pains in his intestines; and in spite of his efforts not to let anyone know of his sufferings, they sometimes impeded his utterance in the pulpit, compelled him to stop half-fainting on his way up stairs, and caused him to drop suddenly into a chair, in the very middle of a conversation. When questioned as to whether he was suffering: "Yes, a little," would be his only answer. He was also incessantly convulsed by a dry, hacking cough.

But to what torture was his poor, aching body condemned in the narrow, wooden cell where he remained shut up for sixteen or seventeen hours every day to hear confessions, with feet motionless and back bent, each shoulder, in turn, being bruised by the hard wood!

In winter, he was very cold, when the north-east wind, after having been chilled on the snowy heights of the Jura, and the frozen marshes of the Dombe, rushed boisterously into the church, whenever the great door was opened, and blowing through every chink in the confessional, cut his face and numbed his limbs. He owned to the Abbé Tailhades one year, that both his feet were frozen, adding, "When I quit the confessional, I am obliged to look for my legs, and then to touch them, to find out if I still have any."

In summer it was worse: for no air came to him

except a little from the front, and even that little—still more restricted by the curtain—was dense and impure from the hot exhalations of two hundred persons. When he left it he could not support himself; he was obliged to lean on the benches and chairs. If he had to visit some sick person, he was seen walking through the streets of the village quite doubled up, and obliged to stop every other moment.

After such a day how was it possible for him to sleep peacefully! He used to say that "one hour of sound sleep sufficed to make him gallop." But that hour he scarcely ever had. The Abbé Monnin reports, "He avowed to us that when he had extended himself, panting for breath, upon his wretched bed of straw '*il souffrait comme un malheureux*.' He did nothing but cough, and was bathed in perspiration, coiling himself up, and twisting and turning about, seeking a good place and finding none, rising perhaps as often as four or five times each hour. And when the pain began to be allayed by its very intensity, and he could have dropped into a quiet sleep, it was the hour when this poor, aged man of seventy, by an heroic effort renewed morning after morning, tore himself from repose before he had even tasted it."

To these physical sufferings moral ones were added, whose nature can only be understood by interpreting the words, "he was a saint, and lived with sinners," in their fullest significance. He was a saint, that is to say, he was supremely pure, loyal, charitable, and mortified, and yet he had to pass his days in hearing people relate their sins of obscenity,

cheating, violence, and excess of all kinds! He was a saint, that is to say, he loved God with all his soul; and they scarcely told him of anything except offences committed against God. This lacerated his heart, and in his most intimate conversations he could not repress the grief it caused him.

"Ah! it is here one must come, to know all the harm that the sin of Adam has done to us," he repeated time after time.

"My God!" he exclaimed one day "how weary I am of sinners! When shall I be with saints?"

And another day: "The good God is so much sinned against, that one is almost tempted to ask for the end of the world. If there were not, here and there, some beautiful souls to repose the heart, and solace the eyes for all the evil that one sees and hears, we could not tolerate each other in this life."

And to one of his fellow-priests: "I pine away with melancholy on this wretched earth, my soul is sad even unto death. My ears hear nothing but painful things which break my heart with grief."

And to another, "When one thinks of the ingratitude of man towards the good God, one is tempted to escape to the other side of the world so as not to see it any more. It is dreadful! and would be dreadful in any case, even if the good God were not so good! But he is so good!" And whilst speaking thus, his face was bathed in tears.

At the recollection of the faults which had been confessed to him, his sorrow burst forth even in public. "No," he sometimes exclaimed during his catechizings, with an emotion which at once communi-

cated itself to his hearers, so certain were they that it was of himself he spoke, "No, there is no one in the world so unfortunate as a priest! How is his life passed? In seeing and hearing the good God offended! His Holy Name blasphemed! His commandments violated! His love outraged! The priest sees and hears nothing else but that! . . . He is like Saint Peter at the prætorium of Pilate, always having before his eyes Our Lord insulted, despised, mocked, covered with ignominy. . . . Some spitting in His face, others buffeting Him, plaiting a crown of thorns upon His Head, and striking Him with heavy blows. They push Him, they cast Him to the ground, they trample Him under foot, they crucify Him, they pierce Him to the heart. . . . Ah! if I had known what it was to be a priest, instead of going to the Seminary I should very quickly have made my escape to *la Trappe*."

If he could only have had the consciousness of the immense good that he was doing to sustain him! But this consolation was denied.

He thought of a curé's mission with terror. How many have been canonized? Scarcely any. Not one, perhaps. This saint was a monk; that one a missionary; others were laymen, many were bishops; and nevertheless the number of bishops is infinitely less than the number of curés. Neither Saint Vincent de Paul nor Saint François Régis wished to remain curés to the end. . . . "But again, what a task! It is thought, prayer, intimate union with God that a priest needs. The curé, however, lives in the world; he converses, mixes in politics,

reads the newspapers, has his head full of them; then he goes to read his breviary, and say his Mass; and so, alas! he does it as if it were an ordinary thing! And then, too, the Confessional, and the Sacraments! Ah! how fearful it is to be a curé!" This is what many persons have often heard him say.

None of the curés appeared to him to have such a crushing burden as his, because he considered himself absolutely unfit to carry the least load. He really thought he was utterly devoid of intelligence, and without any zeal or virtue. Therefore he never spoke of his person or his works without employing the word, which one uses to express pity, and especially pity mixed with contempt. Thus it was always his *poor* soul, his *poor* body, his *poor* sins, his *pauvre misère*. He joyfully accepted all contradictions. He always asked his fellow-helpers to reprimand him. He was astonished that God allowed him to cumber the earth: "How good God is," he said, "to bear with my unworthiness. God, in His great mercy, has given me nothing on which I may lean, neither talent, learning, strength, nor virtue. When I reflect about myself, I discover nothing but my *poor* sins. And yet the good God does not let me see all of them and I do not thoroughly know myself. That sight would make me fall into despair."

In the atmosphere of flattery by which he was surrounded, he would not have become a saint had it not been for this incomparable humility. But if it was the armour which allowed him to pass un-

hurt through such an extraordinary test of his virtue, as the sight of these kneeling crowds which each day surrounded him, it was also an indescribable torture. For every mark of attention made the blood rush to his cheeks as if he had received a blow, and the least praise caused him to shed bitter tears. When on Sundays the preachers used to speak of him he would flee, quite overcome, to the sacristy. On seeing his picture in the village shops, he hastened his steps to hide himself. When he knew they had written his biography, "Do you wish," said he reproachfully, "to sell me at the fair?" Mgr. Devie, who, however, quite understood the susceptibility of this elect soul, having one day gone so far as to call him "his holy Curé," he was quite in despair. "How unhappy I am! Everyone, even Monseigneur, is deceived in me." He was so abashed at receiving a Canon's hood, that he never wore it except on the day of his installation, and it was with amazement, that he learnt one day in the month of August 1855, that he was named Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

The witness in the process of Beatification, to whom he had confided a singular prayer, tells us that, in the depth of his humility, he one day asked God for grace to know his nothingness, and this favour was granted him. He thus saw, that it is God who inspires our good actions, and works in us; we bring no other co-operation than our consent, which we often refuse, and in that case nothing remains but our malice. "This view of myself I had for eighteen months, and fearing that it would

end by plunging me into despair, I prayed to God that He would withdraw it, which at length He did."

Thus fully persuaded of his unworthiness, with his suffering body, his soul torn by the vileness revealed to him in confession, and less happy in the good that he accomplished than afflicted in thinking of all that remained to be done, one understands that the Curè d'Ars was quite sincere when he said, one day, to the Abbé Toccanier: "How much I am to be pitied! I do not know anyone more unhappy than I." And as time could only increase the sufferings of so refined a nature, we can understand why he so often repeated some months before he died, "Ah, how sad this life is! When I came to Ars if I could only have foreseen what sufferings awaited me, I should at once have died of fear."

Against the incessant assault of these innumerable sufferings he sought for help in prayer, "which is always sweet," he said, "which is as honey to the soul, and which causes one's troubles to melt away as the sun melts the snow."

How and when did he pray? How intimate was his intercourse with God? What were his trials and consolations? One does not know exactly, but one may divine many things of his interior life by reading the summary of his catechetical instructions. Though not taking his audience fully into his confidence, he often did so indirectly. From the nature of such an instruction, or the force of such a word, one has no trouble in understanding that he himself practised what he recommended,

and each time he says, "this is how one ought to act," we are right in concluding that this is how he acted himself.

He used to pray nearly the whole of the night because he awoke several times an hour, and each time he certainly hastened to follow this counsel which he gave to others. "See, my children, that when you awake in the night, you transport yourself quickly in spirit before the Tabernacle, saying: 'Behold me, my God, I come to adore Thee, to praise, thank, and love Thee, and to keep Thee company with all the angels.'"

His prayer was the more fervent because he knew that all the parish was then asleep, and that if he did not adore God, no one else was worshipping Him at that moment in Ars. One feels indeed that the happiness of which he spoke during one of his instructions was habitual with him, and that he experienced it in his sleepless nights. "What happiness do we not feel in the presence of God when we find ourselves alone at His feet. 'Come, my soul, redouble thy fervour, thou art alone to adore thy God, His glance rests on thee alone.'"

During the day he devoted to prayer, all the time that was not taken up by the duties of his ministry, and in order not to lose any moment of this time—always too short for his desires—he used to pray while going from his room to the church, from the sacristy to the confessional, and also when going to see his sick parishioners. For do we not find this unintentional avowal in another of his discourses? "When we walk along the street let

us fix our eyes on Our Lord bearing His cross before us; on the Blessed Virgin who beholds us, and on our good Angel who is by our side. How beautiful is this interior life! It brings us into communion with the good God."

Here is another and more explicit confidence. "Prayer makes the time pass very rapidly and so happily that we are unconscious of its duration. As I was travelling through the Bresse when all the curés were ill, I used to pray to the good God the whole way, and I assure you the time did not seem long."

He has made other confidences of the same kind, betraying in all simplicity, without any thought of boasting, the secret of the graces which he had obtained, convinced in his humility that where he, who was so unworthy, had succeeded, no one could possibly fail. Thus he says again: "One prayer which is pleasing to God, is to ask the Blessed Virgin to offer the mangled and bleeding form of her Divine Son to the Eternal Father, for the conversion of sinners. It is the best prayer that one can make, since, after all, every prayer is made in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ. My children, mark this well; every time that I have obtained a grace I have asked it in this way; and it has never failed."

In prayer, as in everything else, he was very simple and did not seek to appear before God other than he was: recollected but unaffected in manner, with no striking gestures, or prolonged genuflexions. A priest one day told his first historian that the curé had recommended him, when hearing his confession, not to attract attention by his attitude in church. "He

had no doubt observed, that I used to bow profoundly to the altar. 'My friend,' he added, 'do not let us make ourselves remarked.'"

Still less did he make phrases. He advised one to use very simple language to God, and he certainly himself used such words as a child would when speaking to its mother, if it were hungry, or afraid of falling, or wished for a caress. "You must often ask," he said, "during the day for the light of the Holy Spirit, and often repeat; 'My God, have pity on me,' like a child who says to its mother: 'Give me a piece of bread, give me your hand, kiss me.'"

Again he said: "It is not necessary to speak very much in order to pray well. You know that the good God is in the Tabernacle; you open your heart to Him and you feel happy in His Holy Presence. This is the best of all prayers."

"One knows that God is there." Having this certitude to an extraordinary degree, he conversed with God as naturally as if he saw Him with his eyes, touched Him with his hands, and were sure of receiving His answers. This he explained one day in brief and striking words to a person who, having heard him speaking on faith, asked "What is faith?" He answered, "Faith is when one speaks to God as to a man."

This feeling of the Divine Presence was especially striking when he was in church. "Before there were so many people," relates Catherine in her notes, "he always read his Office kneeling prostrate on the pavement of the Sanctuary, without anything to lean against. He often paused and regarded the

Tabernacle with eyes which expressed such joy that one would have thought that he saw Our Lord. When the Blessed Sacrament was exposed he did not sit down, except when there was a priest present who was a stranger, that he might not do differently from him. Then he would turn towards the altar with an ecstatic smile. One of his colleagues, one day noticing him in this attitude, instinctively glanced at the altar, as if he expected to see something there."

Again, when he preached from the altar, his eyes never rested on the Tabernacle without his being seized with a kind of breathless transport. He never spoke of the Mass without being moved to tears. "Oh, my friend," he said one day to a seminarist, who was speaking of the grandeur of the priesthood, "when I carry the Blessed Sacrament to the right, It remains there, I carry It to the left and It remains there also. One will never understand the happiness there is in saying Mass until one is in heaven."

When one so firmly believes that God is always there before one, prayer becomes a continual necessity to answer to the needs of the heart, and however painful may be the trials of existence, the interior life offers, at least at moments, those consolations, which convert every suffering into joy. Let us again quote from his instructions; for in the dearth of direct confidences made by M. Vianney about himself, what other resource have we but to seek in his sermons, the teaching in which one recognises, in spite of himself, something of his inner experience. Thus he says:—

"The interior life is a sea of love in which the soul is plunged and is, as it were, drowned in love. Just as a mother holds her child's face in her hands to cover it with kisses, so does God hold the devout man. . . . I often think of the joy of the Apostles when they saw Our Lord again. The separation had been so cruel, Our Lord loved them so much. He was so good to them we must believe that He embraced them, while saying to them; 'Peace be unto you.' It is thus that he embraces our souls when we pray. He still says unto us: 'Peace be unto you.'"

"When we go to Communion," said M. Vianney another day, "we experience an extraordinary feeling of comfort which seems to envelope us entirely. What is this but Our Lord communicating Himself to every part of our being and making us thrill with joy? We are obliged to exclaim like St John: 'It is the Lord.'"

Besides these interior joys, was he favoured by more extraordinary graces? Was he like St Paul transported in spirit to the third heaven? Did he receive divine visitations?

Through an avowal made to Catherine Lassagne, we know that he once felt himself imperiously warned of his duty without being able to explain how the order had been conveyed to him. "I do not know if it were really a voice I heard, or only a dream, but be it as it may, it awoke me. This Voice told me that to snatch a soul from sin was more pleasing to God than any sacrifice, I was just then imposing on myself severe penances."

"We thought," added Catherine, "after repeating

this remark, that he had perhaps resolved on practising some great austerities which would have undermined his strength, and that God by this extraordinary and supernatural warning may have sought to dissuade him from so doing."

We know through another incident which he confided to the Abbé Monnin, that he was once mysteriously comforted in his distress: "About two months ago," he said one day, "when I could not sleep, I was sitting on my bed, weeping over my *poor* sins, when I heard a sweet voice murmur in my ear: *In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in eternum.* This encouraged me a little, but, as my trouble of mind continued, the same voice repeated still more distinctly, *In te, Domine, speravi.*" Still he saw nothing, and declared that he did not know who had spoken to him so sweetly.

He also confided to the Abbé Toccanier another experience, less explicit, but which hinted at still rarer favours. In his deposition, the latter relates: "On the 2nd of November 1856, M. Vianney, speaking of the foundations he had just made, acknowledged in the presence of the Brothers of the Holy Family that, during the night, he used to weary the good saints with his pleadings." "You pray in the night also, M. le Curé?" "When I am awake. I am old now and have not much time to live, one must make the most of each moment." "But you lie on the hard boards, and you hardly sleep." He answered impressively, "One is not always sleeping on the hard boards." Some moments after I said to him: "M. le Curé, the good God by these foundations makes you see

clearly that He wishes you to be here." "There is much more than that."

What were those other signs by which God had shown that He was content with his services? Was he alluding to an apparition of St Philomena, of which he had spoken in veiled words to Catherine Lassagne? What had he seen or heard, the remembrance of which had so powerfully affected him? He has kept it secret, for, reading too much curiosity in the eyes of his missionary, he repented having said so much, and never again reverted to the subject.

But from this imperfect confidence we may conclude that at times he had certainly had, even here below, a foretaste of celestial joys. He was all the more impatient to quit this world in which he maintained that "a good Christian ought not to be able to bear himself, but ought always to pine for a better." A sentiment which he explained by one of his familiar but most characteristic comparisons. "If a little child were there in this church, and its mother were in the pulpit, it would stretch its little hands out towards her, and, if it could not mount the staircase which led to her, it would seek help and would have no rest till it was in its mother's arms."

In spite of the ardour of his affection for Him, Whom he thus compared to a mother, he lingered long here below. Long before his cry was answered, he stretched forth his hands, as innocent as when quite a child, he used to hide in his father's stable to pray. It was only when old age crept on and rendered him incapable of labouring for the

salvation of souls, that he was invited to go up higher. This was more than two months after he had entered his 74th year, and more than six months since the 42nd anniversary of his apostolate in the Dombes.

## CHAPTER XI

### HIS DEATH AND THE PROCESS OF BEATIFICATION

THOSE who expected from the Curé d'Ars, when dying, abundant tears, burning words and revelations about the happiness of the elect, were much disappointed; in death as in life he was simple and unaffected. In his case we may repeat the words of Bossuet when admiring the tranquil end of a brilliant princess, who having lived a worldly life had yet died as a Christian: "Une sainte simplicité fait ici toute la grandeur."

The intense heat of July 1859, had made the overcrowded little church of Ars like a furnace in which it was impossible to stay long without suffocating. Those who were waiting their turn were constantly obliged to go out to breathe a little fresh air; yet M. Vianney never left the heated confessional in which his zeal kept him a prisoner. He never even complained, but became gradually weaker. It was known that he had fallen half-fainting several times while descending the stairs from his room, and such words as: "Ah! the sinners will kill the sinner" escaped him involuntarily, from which one gathered that he would soon succumb under his heavy task.

On Friday, July 29th, after having, as usual, spent sixteen or seventeen hours in the confessional, he

went home quite exhausted. And sinking down on a chair, exclaimed, "I can do no more." Still he would not allow any one to sit up with him, and the missionaries were obliged to retire.

At one o'clock in the morning he called Catherine Lassagne, who hurried to his bed-side. "You are tired, M. le Curé."—"Yes, I think it is my *poor end*." —"I will go and call someone."—"No, do not trouble anybody, it is not worth while."

When morning came, as he felt still more feeble, he accepted the help which he had until then refused. He let Brother Jerome slip a mattress under his miserable straw pallet. When one wished to give him a little air and drive away the flies with a fan, he objected, "Leave me," said he, "with my *poor flies*."

At the news that he would not leave his room that day, and perhaps never again, the whole village and all the pilgrims were in great consternation. The church was at once filled with supplicants, who came to implore Heaven to keep him with them. For three days this concert of fervent prayers was uninterrupted, but he himself refused to join in them.

"Monsieur le Curé," said one, "let us hope that St Philomena, whom we are going to invoke most earnestly, will restore you to health this time, as she did eighteen years ago." "Oh! St Philomena can do nothing now." He knew that the hour of recompense had come, that hour which he had foreseen and announced, several times, since the beginning of the summer. When some one had given him a veil to wrap round the monstrance in the processions

of the Blessed Sacrament. "I shall only use it once," said he. And when they made him sign the receipt for his stipend he remarked, "That will do for my burial." In the course of July, Madame Pauze, a pious woman of St Etienne, told him of the grief which oppressed her at the thought of never seeing him again, for she did not think of returning to Ars. "But, my child," he had answered, "in three weeks we shall see each other again." Three weeks later they met in heaven.

On Tuesday evening he asked for the last Sacraments. He shed tears when the bell announced that Jesus had left the Tabernacle to visit him, and again when he saw the priest entering his room. One of his helpers threw himself on his knees before his bed and implored him to ask God for his recovery; but he made a sign of dissent. After he had received Extreme Unction, he was asked if there was anything he desired. "You have forgotten," he answered, "to give me the indulgence of the 'Bona Mors,'" thereupon the Abbé Toccanier gave it to him. When they begged him afterwards to bless the parish, his missionaries and all the charitable works already begun, he closed his eyes and prayed, then raised in a last benediction that hand so often extended to bless. After that he closed his eyes, but reopened them again to smile gently on his bishop, who had arrived in haste and was clasping him in his arms. On Thursday, August 4th, at two in the morning he ceased to breathe, just as the Abbé Toccanier, while reciting the prayers for the commendation of the soul, uttered these words: "Veniant

illi obviam sancti Angeli Dei et perducant eum in civitatem coelestem Jerusalem." "Let the holy angels of God come forth to meet him, and conduct him to the city of the heavenly Jerusalem."

The tidings of his death were announced to the many worshippers who filled the church. At once the voice of the people, in this case truly the voice of God, began to exalt him, who had so loved humility. For two whole days immense crowds passed before his body, which was covered with flowers, and clothed in the poor soutane and cotta, that for thirty years he had so constantly worn.

Such numbers brought crosses, rosaries, and medals to touch his sacred hands, that the arms of the priests charged with this office were quite stiff and weary; and the shops in Ars were entirely despoiled of all the pious objects which they contained.

On Saturday, the day of the funeral, if that triumphant ceremony can be so called, nearly six thousand persons, some of whom had come from the remotest parts of France, were crowded together on the square and in the streets of the village. The funeral knell resounded from every neighbouring steeple. Three thousand priests preceded the coffin. All knelt as it passed, as if to receive a benediction, and though many eyes were overflowing with tears, every heart was penetrated with Christian joy, so assured were they that the day of his death was the birthday of a saint.

The Bishop of Belley, who spoke in the open square, did but translate the thoughts of his audience

by choosing, as the text of his discourse, words which the church chants in the office for her confessors, "Euge! serve bone et fidelis, intra in gaudium Domini tui." "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Everybody understood the hope implied by the choice of this text; and when the orator had described the life which had just ended, his recital so much resembled a panegyric that no one was astonished at its conclusion: "And be assured,' said he, addressing himself to the beloved and venerated curé, "that the most joyful and most earnestly desired day of my episcopate will be that, on which the voice of the Church shall permit me to acclaim you solemnly, and to chant in your honour: "Euge! serve bone et fidelis, intra in gaudium Domini tui."

Mgr. de Langalerie did not live to see that day, for the Church does not pronounce her judgments hastily; but seldom has a process been so rapidly examined as that of the Blessed Vianney. In less than forty-five years after his body had been laid in the vault hollowed out at the foot of his pulpit, the Holy See had issued a decree, declaring that one might confidently proceed with his Beatification. Scenes took place six years after his death, on August 4th 1865, which in some measure anticipated the fêtes of the Beatification. On that day the sanctuary, in which the relics are now exposed to the veneration of the faithful, was inaugurated.

It was M. Vianney himself who had first had the idea of building this church.

He had long dreamt of erecting a beautiful altar to St Philomena, when a poor woman whose child had been cured of blindness gave M. Toccanier twenty francs, saying: "For M. le Curé to use them as God may inspire him." The Abbé Toccanier carried the piece of money to M. Vianney and said: "Would you like this little gift to be the leaven of the sum necessary to erect an altar to St Philomena? I only ask for your approbation and benediction." The holy curé having given both, M. Toccanier at once began collecting from house to house. In a few hours he had got seventeen hundred francs, a large sum for such a little village, and the altar was erected by the architect Bossan.

The success of the subscription made at Ars emboldened M. Vianney, and he spoke not only of an altar, but of a sanctuary. He opened the new subscription list, promised a hundred francs himself, and at the head of it wrote these words, which were to loosen so many purse strings: "My prayers are promised to those who will aid me in building a beautiful church to St Philomena."

But he himself never saw the building. The project of the lottery which he had submitted to the government was not authorised, and soon afterwards exhausted and worn out by his zeal, he was stretched on his death-bed.

While he was piously awaiting the end, the Abbé Toccanier bent down and whispered to him: "My father, is there then no hope for our beautiful church." At these words the dying man raised his head and

his eyes brightened. "Courage, my friend," said he, "you will succeed."

Emboldened by the remembrance of these words, the Abbé Toccanier lost no time in taking up the work again, and after some preliminary difficulties everything was happily arranged. The government which had at first refused to consent to a lottery of fifty thousand francs, now authorised one of a hundred thousand. Money flowed in from all parts, and on May 1st 1862 the necessary funds were collected.

The work was at once begun. Bossan, who resembled the great architects of the Middle Ages in his thorough comprehension of Christian symbolism, admirably understood what memory and hope demanded. He was obliged to leave the humble church which had been the scene of this marvellous apostolate just as it was before; but it was necessary to give it a crown which would be the symbol of the recompense so ardently desired by the apostle. So the small church remained intact, but on its apse rose an octagonal cupola of a style until then unknown, Roman at its base but narrowing gracefully to the summit, which was crowned by a cross surmounted by palms and lilies. At the eight angles, leaning against the wall, with their faces turned to the pilgrims, and presenting to them the instruments of the martyrdom of St Philomena, were lovely figures of angels, masterpieces of the sculptor Dufraine, who, as is often the case, was ignored during his life-time by the critics, though since his death they have discovered him to be a great artist.

Under this original crown of stone, the interior of which was ornamented by some interesting frescoes by Borrel, was erected the altar of St Philomena, and also three others. One of the latter remained temporarily, without either patron or image.

On the day of the inauguration, the name of the Curé d'Ars was constantly associated with that of St Philomena in the panegyrics of the orators as well as in the remarks of the crowd, and joy beamed from every face when Mgr. de Langelerie, standing once again in the village square, on the spot where six years previously he had saluted the coffin of M. Vianney, announced that the first phase of the formalities, necessary to the glorification of the holy priest, was accomplished: the documents relating to it had been sent to the Congregation of Rites.

Whilst the process was following its due course at Rome, M. Vianney's fame spread throughout the length and breadth of France.

The missionaries of the Diocese of Belley continued their charitable works under the direction of M. Camelot, M. Toccanier, M. Ball and M. Couvert, who, one after the other, received the title of Curé d'Ars, a title obscure a hundred years ago, but now, without exception, the most glorious a French curé could bear. In order that Ars might not cease to be a centre of spiritual life in the Lyonese District, they organised periodical retreats, which are still very successful at the present day.

The pilgrimage was uninterrupted, and sick people continued as before to wend their way to Ars. But what they had formerly begged through the inter-

cession of St Philomena, they now dared to ask through the medium of the Curé d'Ars as they extended their maimed or crippled limbs upon his tomb. Celebrated cures were made, which were recorded in official reports, added to the other documents of the process.

Meanwhile the public were eagerly asking to know more of the life and good works of him who was about to be beatified. The Abbé Monnin responded to their demands by writing the life of M. Vianney, an eloquent work, to which we acknowledge our indebtedness. Indeed this biography of the Curé d'Ars has a great advantage over all others, since the author was M. Vianney's fellow-labourer, a confidant of some of his thoughts and a witness of his death.[1] He also published a summary of his catechisings and conversations, under the title of, *The Spirit of the Curé d'Ars*.[2]

The Abbé Olivier, in his turn, contributed a life of M. Vianney to the compilation called *The Annals of Sanctity*.[3] The two Abbés Delaroche published his *Sermons*.[4] Under the name of *Flowers of Ars* pious

[1] *Le Curé d'Ars*, a life of the Venerable Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney, by the Abbé Alfred Monnin, Missionary, 2 vols. ; Paris, Douniol.

[2] *Esprit du Curé d'Ars.* M. Vianney in his catechisings, homilies, and conversations, by the Abbé A. Monnin, Paris, Douniol.

[3] *Vie du Venerable Serviteur de Dieu. Jean-Marie-Baptiste Vianney, Curé d'Ars*, by the Abbé J. H. Olivier ; Paris, Bloud and Barral.

[4] *Sermons* by the Venerable Servant of God, Jean-Baptiste Vianney, Curé d'Ars, edited by M. le Chanoine Etienne Delaroche and the R. P. Marie-Augustin Delaroche, 4 vols. ; Paris, Beauchesne.

little books were compiled of thoughts taken from his catechisings and homilies. Every year, on the fourth of August, the anniversary of his death was solemnly celebrated at Ars, and the most eloquent preachers of the day, both bishops and priests, were asked to pronounce his panegyric. Finally, his successors have issued monthly, since June 1900, a little review called "The Annals of Ars," in which they recall M. Vianney's teachings, relate anecdotes of his apostolate not known before, and chronicle the pilgrimage. Another biography of the holy curé has recently been published. It is written by the elegant and vigorous pen of a true scholar, who made a special study of his diocese as it was in the last century, and availed himself of many unpublished documents, so that his life gives a very exact portrait of our hero.[1]

Whilst the mind and soul of M. Vianney were being thus recalled, a talented sculptor, Emilien Cabuchet, made an attempt to reproduce his features.

Some time before the holy curé's death, wishing to make his bust, he obtained a letter of introduction for that purpose from Mgr. Chalandon. But his request met with a decided refusal, and as he was unwilling to abandon his project, he went to Ars incognito. He confessed to his model in order to

[1] The author of that biography is M. H. Sevin, Canon of the Diocese of Belley, who will perhaps pardon this mention of his name, and accept many thanks for all the services he has been kind enough to render me, especially the great one of having communicated facts not previously known.

have a good view of his face, and attended the catechisings, modelling meantime in his hat. One day, he unfortunately took it into his head to introduce himself as the sculptor of the statue of St Vincent de Paul, just then erected at Châtillon, and to reveal the motive of his presence. He received at once a sharp reprimand. Requested to withdraw without having accomplished anything, he was thus apostrophised in the midst of the crowded church: "Come, come, my friend, you have distracted every one's attention, and mine amongst the rest, quite long enough." The artist persisted no more, but left Ars. He returned, however, after a certain time, in the confident belief he was forgotten. But as he began his work during the catechising, unnoticed as he thought in the crowd, M. Vianney's quick eye detected him at once. In the evening he was accosted by the good curé, rebuked, and told that he must go away. "Come, come, my friend, is there nothing you have to do at home?" "But what crime have I committed?" "You know quite well."

Happily the rough model was advanced enough to be finished from memory. When death came, and M. Vianney's modesty could no longer prevent any one from rendering him homage, it was a full length statue, and not a simple bust, that was demanded of M. Cabuchet. He represented the holy curé in his most familiar attitude, kneeling with hands joined as if in prayer. His features, the gesture of his hands, the pose of his head, the expression of his lips, his physiognomy, all were so happily caught and

reproduced, that this truly admirable likeness ranks amongst the best works of contemporary sculpture.

Humble Curé d'Ars! how far were you from thinking whilst you lived, that your *poor* face, as you used to call it, would inspire a work of art! And how much further still from suspecting that there would soon be an office for a curé in the Breviary, and that that office would be yours!

The history of the process of the Beatification cannot be detailed here, only the essential facts of it with their dates will be given.

On October the 3rd 1874, M. Vianney was proclaimed Venerable by Pope Pious IX.

On June the 21st 1896, the last congregation charged with pronouncing on the heroic degree of virtue of the Venerable Curé d'Ars met, under the presidency of Pope Leo XIII., Cardinal Parocchi,—one of the most eminent members of the Sacred College — being the reporter of the cause. The judges unanimously replied in the affirmative. The Holy Father, without notifying his decision, did not conceal how profoundly this unanimity impressed him. "There is reason to augur well of this cause," he said. "For if the exemplary virtues practised by the Venerable Servant of God during the whole course of his life, have shone alone, by the splendour of their own brilliancy till now, they will become more radiant still, from the unanimous approval just bestowed on them. On August 1st he solemnly promulgated the decree recognising the heroic degree of virtue of the Venerable Vianney. It is one of the most eloquent decrees of the kind the

Congregation of Rites has had to register. The ardent piety of the Servant of God, the special assistance he received to attract sinners to repentance, the excellence of his counsels, his charity and his reputation for sanctity are all exalted in the highest terms.

Leo XIII., who took great interest in this cause, as he did in everything connected with France, had fixed July 14th 1903 for the meeting of the Congregation which, under his presidency, was to examine the miracles of the Venerable Vianney. Then he altered his mind and put off this meeting till November, reserving the session on July 14th for the examination of the virtues of the Venerable Joan of Arc, another French cause. But the proposed meeting did not take place, for the day on which it was to be held the illustrious old man lay dying, so that instead of being called upon to rejoice at the exaltation of her national heroine, Christian France mourned the approaching death of the great Pontiff, who had loved her so well.

The joy of glorifying the humble country curé was reserved for one who had also been a country curé himself. On August 4th 1903, by a happy coincidence, at the very hour when a solemn High Mass was being chanted at Ars, to celebrate the forty-fourth anniversary of the death of Jean-Marie Vianney, the former Curé of Tombolo was elected Pope at Rome, taking the name of Pius X.

On January 26th 1904 the new Pontiff who had thus begun his reign on the fête of the

Curé d'Ars, presided over the Congregation instead of his predecessor, Cardinal Matthieu being reporter of the cause. Two instances were brought forward, the restoration to health of little Adélaïde Joly, and the cure of the boy Leon Roussat. The latter, attacked by epilepsy, had in 1862 been carried from St Laureut-les-Macon to the tomb of the Venerable Vianney, and laid upon it. His legs were useless, one of his arms was paralysed, he had lost the power of speech, and breathed with such difficulty that he could not retain his saliva: but when they lifted him off the tomb he had not only recovered the use of his legs, but he stretched out his maimed hand and gave alms to a poor man; and by the end of the Novena, he spoke with fluency. The former, a little inmate of an infirmary kept by the *Filles de Charité*, had been afflicted with a white tumour on her arm in February 1861. The doctors having abandoned hope and declared all treatment of the case to be useless, the Sisters had put a boot-lace, that had belonged to the Venerable Vianney, upon the poor child's arm, and the tumour had disappeared.

The Congregation gave a favourable decision, and on February 21st the Sovereign Pontiff promulgated the Decree in which these miracles were held to be sufficient for the process of Beatification, and in the same Decree he proposed the Curé d'Ars as the model of the parochial clergy, in these words: "The heart-felt joy We experience, in promulgating the solemn decree affirming the miracles wrought

through the intercession of the Venerable John-Baptist Vianney for the cause of his Beatification, cannot be expressed in adequate words. To Ourself, who for so many years filled the office of parish priest, nothing could be more pleasing or profitable than to see this venerable parish priest honoured as one of the Blessed, and all the more because all, who are engaged in the work for souls, will feel as if his glory were reflected on them. God grant that every priest may follow the example of the Venerable Vianney and imbibe in the same school the admirable piety to God, which charmed souls by its mute eloquence in his life-time in such a manner as to surpass all merely human eloquence. May all parish priests remember the example of John-Baptist Vianney and imitate the ardent charity which urges us to despise all things, even life itself."

Lastly, on January the 8th 1895, the humble priest was solemnly enrolled in the ranks of the Blessed; and all will agree with me, when I add, that the Beatification of the Blessed Curé d'Ars caused greater joy and rejoicing in France, than any other Beatification since that of St Vincent de Paul. His life plainly reveals the reason why, the virtues, which in him were carried by the inspiration of divine grace to the very height of sublime heroism, are those eminently characteristic of the sterling qualities of the people and peasants of France. May these same virtues, through his protection, flourish more vigorously than ever on our soil!

# APPENDIX

## THE NAME OF THE BLESSED CURÉ D'ARS

THE name of the Blessed Curé d'Ars is written Vianey in his baptismal certificate:—

Jean Marie Vianey, the legitimate son of Mathieu Vianey and of Marie Beluze his wife, was born May 8th 1786 and baptized the same day by me the undersigned *vicaire*; his godfather was Jean Marie Vianey his paternal uncle an inhabitant of Dardilly and his godmother Françoise Martinon wife of the said Jean Marie Vianey both of them *illitérés de ce enquis.*

BLACHON, vic.

The orthography is the same in the marriage contract of the father and mother of the Blessed Vianney;—in the death certificate of his father Matthieu Vianey (July 11th 1819), which certificate is signed Vianey by the son of the deceased, François Vianey; and also in the death certificate of the latter, (April 6th 1855), signed by his son Antoine Vianey, the last of the near relatives of the Blessed Vianney bearing his name.

The name is correctly written Vianey in the Register of Ordinations (preserved in the Arch-

bishop's palace at Lyons) on the list of those in minor orders and on the list of the sub-deacons, dated July 2nd 1814. It was written Vianay on the list of deacons bearing the date of June 23rd 1815. By a fresh error it was written Viannay in the letters which sent the young deacon to Grenoble to be ordained priest. The deed relating to his ordination has preserved this spelling, and it was under the name of Viannay that the new priest was inscribed on the register of priests in the diocese of Lyons. The same spelling is also found in the deed of his nomination as Curé d'Ars.

After his ordination to the priesthood the Curé d'Ars always signed himself Vianney. Perhaps he wished his signature to resemble that adopted in the registers at the Archbishop's palace, and in his *mandats de traitement*; or again he might have been influenced by that in the death certificate of his mother, Marie Beluze, (Feb. 8th 1811): this death having been attested by her husband Matthieu Vianey, who could not sign his name, the clerk at the *Mairie* of Dardilly wrote the names as he thought fit; he wrote them as Vianney and Beluse. It was not only with the spelling of proper names that he took liberties, for in the same act he stated that "ledit Vianney" was "illetéré."

As the Curé d'Ars signed Vianney and this spelling has been adopted in the certificate of his death (which after all fixes his *état civil*), and also in all the documents relating to the Beatification we could not write it differently. But on the other hand we could

not write his parents' name otherwise than it is found in all their family letters and papers, with the exception of the certificate of his mother's death. We are thus obliged to adopt this strange solution of calling the father *Vianey* and the son *Vianney*. This question of spelling is after all of minor importance.

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